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writing as "G. Wayman Jones"

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Series editor/publisher: Anthony Tollin
anthonytollin@shadowsanctum.com

Consulting editor: Will Murray

Copy editor: Joseph Wrzos

Proofreader: CDavid McDonnell

OCR text reconstruction: Tom Roberts

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THE BLACK-BAT

Volume 9

Presenting TWO Complete Book-length adventures from the files of Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime, as originally edited by Leo Margulies.

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Front cover art by Virgil E. Pyle
Back cover art by Rudolph Belarski and Virgil E. Pyle
Interior illustrations by Virgil E. Pyle

THE BLACK BAT'S

"Drop them guns," the crook yelled, "or I'll knife this dame!" (Chapter IX)

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat's Summons," "The Black Bat's Triumph," etc.

CHAPTER I
Murderer Unseen

THE Security Bank and Trust Company opened promptly at nine-thirty—as it had done for the past seventy-some-odd years. One of the first to arrive before the business day formally began and those great copper doors were opened, was Roy Banton. He had been a teller and clerk for more years than he liked to think about, but Roy Banton was not an old man yet, not by any means. His step was spry, and he could riffle ten thousand dollars in big

INVISIBLE ENEMY

Tony Quinn, Masked Avenger of Crime, Rips Aside the Veil of Secrecy That Shrouds a Killer Chief's Grim Activities!

bills through his fingers as fast as the next man.

The bank was an imposing place. A visitor would enter, once those copper doors opened, through glass doors. He would be faced by a semi-circle of tellers' cages and customers' desks. The bank officers were housed well to the rear of the place and could only be reached by first explaining a reason for the visit to an armed guard.

The big room was domed and well lighted. Squarely in the center of the north wall was the gleaming safe with its massive hinges, its combination dials and the ornate chromium door handle that looked like a ship's wheel.

Roy Banton glanced at the clock as he peeled off

his coat and vest. He was swinging into a gray jacket of light material as he hurried toward the safe. The time lock would go off in twenty seconds. Then the assistant cashier would operate his part of the mechanism. Old man Gaube would come tottering from his bookkeeper's office to spin another combination, and then Roy Banton would manipulate the final dial.

It required the release of the time lock and the independent efforts of three men to open that vault. Even the president of the bank could not have done it alone.

The doors, which weighed tons, now swung open as easily as a screen door on the back porch of a little bungalow, one like the house where Roy Banton lived with his father. This vault was a mighty piece of engineering. No thief, nor combination of crooks could have opened it if they were provided with nitro, speed drills, crowbars and even plenty of time. The manufacturers classed this vault as impregnable. It was!

Roy Banton stepped into the vault and passed out currency and silver to other tellers. In five minutes the day's business would start.

Banton was still inside the safe when the first clients entered. At nine-forty there were eleven customers in the bank.

AT that precise moment, Roy Banton gave a wild yell from the depths of the vault. He staggered out of it, eyes bulging, face white as alabaster. He waved his arms and croaked something which nobody could understand. Finally, his voice returned.

"The Albee Construction Company payroll. It's gone! It's gone! It was snatched right out of my hand. Two hundred thousand in bills. Snatched right out of my hand!"

Malloy, head of the bank guards, raced toward Banton and at the same moment yelled for an alarm to be put through. He grabbed Banton and shook him hard.

"Listen to me, Roy! Listen to me. Nobody came out of the safe! Is the crook inside yet?"

"No—no! The money—I held it in my arms! It was lifted right out and I couldn't see the man who did it! He was—invisible!"

A bell began to clang outside the bank. Malloy rushed into the vault, gun in his fist. Nobody could possibly hide there and he was satisfied that the vault was empty. Another guard who had been busy changing pen points at the clients' desks, drew his own weapon and rushed for the main entrance to take up a post there.

He had almost reached the door when he seemed to stumble. Then he fell heavily. A groan came from his lips.

A woman near him screamed, and quietly slithered to the floor, too. Everyone in the bank—and there were enough to verify the story—saw one of those glass doors at the entrance suddenly push outward and then close once more, as if someone they couldn't see had rushed through the doors.

Malloy first of all helped the sobbing, hysterical woman to her feet and half carried her to one of the leather-covered benches. Then he snorted as he approached the older bank guard.

What kind of a tough egg was he—fainting that way? The whole thing was absurd, but the passing out of the bank guard the craziest thing of all. Malloy bent down, grabbed the man by one shoulder and turned him over. Then he stepped back with a sharp cry. His mouth hung slackly open and his breathing came in wheezes.

The bank guard had not fainted—not unless death should be called a permanent fainting spell. The guard was dead and a slim, gray-colored knife haft stuck out just above the region of his heart.

Police, radio cars and the bank's protective agency men were closing in by droves. Malloy recovered his wits well enough to walk, like an automaton, to a telephone. He had the operator call Police Headquarters.

"This is Malloy, chief guard at the Security Bank and Trust," he said. "Something just happened here. Can't explain it, except that one of my men is dead. Yes—dead—murdered. A teller claims that two hundred thousand dollars is missing. Who did it? Man—I don't know, except that it seems a ghost must have committed the crimes. You heard me!"

As Malloy returned to where the corpse lay, one of the customers touched his arm. Malloy whirled on him.

"Don't think I'm crazy," this man reported, "but I—well, I'll swear that someone I couldn't see breezed right past me just before that guard fell down. It was like a gust of wind. You know—as if you'd run past me and I was a little too close."

MALLOY raised both hands and gestured for silence.

"Listen, everybody," he said grimly, "and that includes clients of the bank as well as employees. We're not all crazy. There is an explanation to this. If you'll just have patience, we'll get at the bottom of the affair. Nobody can leave the premises—is that clear? Capable police officers from the Homicide Squad are on their way."

The woman who had fainted jerked her head up.

"H-homicide Squad?" she gasped. Her eyes flitted to where the bank guard lay sprawled on the marble floor. "Do you mean—"

Then she slid off the leather-padded bench and curled up as quietly as a kitten after a full meal. Malloy swore under his breath and wondered what was keeping those Homicide men.

The main doors were locked and heavily guarded

by police. Of one thing Malloy was sure—not even another invisible man could get through that exit.

A squad car pulled up and the first man out was Captain McGrath. He elbowed his way through the crowd, acknowledged the salutes of patrolmen who tried to open a path for him, and finally he was inside the bank.

McGRATH was a powerfully built person with a clipped mustache and beady little eyes. There was character in his face, and strength in his big shoulders. He was well known—for two reasons. His honesty—and his sworn word to some day bring the Black Bat to justice. This latter point was almost an obsession with McGrath, even though sometimes he was forced to admire the Black Bat's work and his methods. The Bat often broke laws, but he branded his handiwork with small stickers in the shape of a bat with wings outspread, so that no one else should be suspected.

To McGrath, any law-breaker fell into the same category—the rightful prey of the police. Captain McGrath never, for an instant, forgot that he was a police officer, and since the Black Bat was a law-breaker, McGrath firmly believed it his duty to bring the Bat to justice.

In the bank now, Malloy tried to explain, but McGrath scoffed at him.

"What kind of malarkey is that?" he demanded. "An invisible man lifting two hundred grand in cash right out of a teller's arms! Suppose the guy was invisible, and you couldn't see him pass through the bank? Then how come nobody saw the money, huh? Where's that teller? I've got an idea he must have smoked a few reefers before he came to work. Invisible man—baloney!"

Malloy had a crimson temper. He pointed at the body of the guard on the floor.

"Does that look like baloney?" he demanded. "There's a knife in Bill's heart. Nobody got near him. Nobody that we could see, that is. How'd that knife get buried in his chest, huh? Come on—I'll let you talk to the teller. And get this—Roy Banton has worked in this bank a long time. He's on the level. Never so much as swiped a penny or even borrowed one. If he says the dough was lifted out of his hands, it was lifted out of his hands, y'understand?"

McGrath glared at Malloy.

"There's one thing I do understand. You're crazier than the teller. Where is he?"

McGrath examined the corpse, placed a guard around it, then walked over to one of the consultation booths. Malloy and Roy Banton were inside. McGrath sat down and relit his stub of a cigar. He eyed Banton appraisingly and had to admit the guy certainly looked all right.

"Now, Banton," McGrath grunted, "let's have the details. Everything."

Banton gulped. "Well—it was the payroll of the Albee Construction Company. They hire a lot of men by the day and usually pay in cash every Wednesday. Last night I got the cash ready and put it in the vault. It was tied up in a canvas sack. The silver was in another. This morning we opened the safe as usual. I handed out cash to the tellers, made a few entries, and then I picked up the sack of currency. As I did so, I—I . . . You'll swear I've lost my mind, officer, but this is the truth! I—felt something move past my cheek. Then, all of a sudden, that sack of money was lifted right out of my arms. There was nobody in the vault but me, I swear it."

CAPTAIN McGRATH'S eyes narrowed. Hopheads arrested in the act of burglarizing a store, told better yarns than this.

"I'm listening," he snapped. "Go ahead."

Banton wetted his lips and ran a finger around the inside of his collar so violently that the neck button popped off.

"That—that's all there is to it," he mumbled. "The sack was held in midair for a few seconds, and I saw the cash being removed from it. As the sheafs of bills came out, they disappeared. Yes they did—right into thin air! You don't have to look at me that way. I know it sounds crazy. It *is* crazy—but what killed Bill, the guard? What went through the doors? I saw them open."

"We'll get to that later," McGrath grunted. "Stick to what happened inside the vault."

"Well, I was suddenly given a tremendous push into a corner. My head hit the steel shelf. I—I guess I was dazed for a minute. That's all. The empty sack is still on the floor.... I—I don't feel so good." Banton slumped into a chair. "I don't believe in ghosts. That is, I never did before, but now... Malloy, somebody did kill Bill? Somebody did pass through the main door?"

"Watch him," McGrath growled. "I'm going into that vault."

McGrath spent plenty of time examining the vault and the empty canvas sack which had held the currency. He tapped the steel walls, the floor, and even climbed up on the shelves to rap the butt of his gun against the roof.

He was completely satisfied that no one could have created some hidden exit through the safe itself. Then he called several of his men and the whole bank was searched. The net result was that the only missing thing was two hundred thousand dollars, all neatly done up in sheafs.

Fingerprint experts were at work on the dead guard, particularly examining the knife handle.

"Clean as a hound's tooth, Cap'n," one of them reported to McGrath. "Not a smudge on the handle. What in blazes is going on here, anyway?"

"Ghosts," McGrath retorted. "Spectres, banshees

—and invisible men. Bah! They'll have me thinking I'm crazy next." He looked around. "Somebody said a client made a statement. Which one was it?"

The man who had told Malloy about the breeze he had felt, stepped up and repeated his information. To dispel the doubt in McGrath's eyes, he grew insistent.

"I'll admit I may be wrong about thinking it was an invisible person, but I swear something passed me. I've got good eyesight and good hearing, too. I didn't see anyone, or hear footsteps. Right after that, the bank guard fell. I thought he'd tripped, and knocked himself out."

"Did you see a knife whiz through the air?" McGrath asked skeptically. "Or was that invisible, too?"

"I didn't see a knife. It's impossible that a knife could have been thrown at the guard. I was about ten or twelve feet away from the door. Nobody was in front of him. Nobody I could see, that is. You can't get behind a man, throw a knife and put a curve in it so the blade goes through his chest when his back is toward you."

"Hey, Murphy!" McGrath called to one of his detectives. "Get this man's name and address. Better make him verify it, too—through papers or phone calls. Be sure he's the guy he says he is. Better yet, I'll frisk him now. That two hundred grand is somewhere around. I don't see how a guy could hide all that dough in his clothes, but stranger things have happened."

"My name"—the stranger pulled out verifying papers—"is Tom Murnay. I'm an engineer. These papers will verify it."

AN hour was consumed in the search. McGrath went from one teller to another. He questioned all the clients, interviewed the bank president about Roy Banton's record, and finally entered the consultation room where Banton was sitting in a dejected pose.

"You still think I'm crazy, don't you?" Banton looked up. "I guess I must be. I should never have said a word about what happened in the vault. I should have known what would happen, and then too—"

"Spill it," McGrath snapped. "You're holding out, Banton. You got something else on your mind."

Banton nodded miserably. "Yes, I have. As I told you—somebody I could not see gave me a push. At the same time I heard a voice right at my ear. It warned me that if I said anything, the speaker would come back and finish me off. You're laughing. I wish you had been in that vault instead of me. I wish anybody had been in there but me. I've got to get some air. I'm sick! Can't you see I'm sick?"

"Take him out the back door," McGrath told Malloy. "If he makes a move, let him have it. He can't get away. The whole block is covered. Hurry up, will you? That guy is ready to pass out cold."

McGrath sat alone in the consultation room for two or three minutes. He tried to orient the fantastic details of the case. He told himself over and over again that there was no such thing as invisibility.

Still... he looked out into the main business room. It was broad daylight. The teller's crazy ideas were backed up by a client—and by a dead man. McGrath knew that as the murdered guard had rushed to the door that nobody had been in front of him. How then could the knife have been rammed into his heart? Where was the money? What had pushed open the glass door at the entrance? There were many witnesses to that phenomenon.

McGrath groaned. It was too much for him. There just didn't seem to be an answer, except that the teller who had been in the vault was lying. An invisible man talking to him! What a laugh!

Then McGrath came out of his chair like a thunderbolt. A shot rang out from somewhere at the rear of the bank. He skidded on the marble floor, dashed down a long corridor and past the sanctums of the bank's officers until he reached the rear door. He bolted through it and saw Malloy, smoking gun in his hand, looking up at the side of the building next door. McGrath looked too, and swore.

Roy Banton was climbing a fire-escape with the speed and agility of a monkey.

"He broke away from me!" Malloy said. "I fired a warning shot, but I didn't want to wing him up there. He'd be killed, and that guy is innocent no matter what you say."

McGrath took a hitch in his pants, pulled out his gun, and headed for the fire-escape.

"Sure," he scoffed. "Innocent men just climb fire-escapes for the devil of it."

McGrath was quick, too, and he even started to gain on the fleeing man. Once he sent a slug whizzing past Banton's head and yelled a command for him to stop, but Banton kept right on going as if seven assorted devils were at his coat tails. He disappeared over the edge of the roof.

McGrath reached it in a matter of seconds. Gun ready, he risked a quick look onto the rooftop. Banton might have picked up a gun some place and McGrath was not deliberately going to be blasted off that high perch.

BUT Banton had crossed the roof and was standing at the very edge of it on the opposite side. He seemed to be teetering like a drunken man. McGrath sprinted toward him.

Then Banton seemed just to lean until his balance was gone. With a wild shriek he shot toward the sidewalk. When McGrath looked over the edge, he saw Banton, spread-eagled on the pavement.

McGrath turned away, but he didn't holster his gun. Not McGrath. Maybe some people might think he was crazy too, but he would have sworn that something he couldn't see had pushed Banton off the roof. If the teller wanted to commit suicide, he would never have poised on the edge like that. He would have simply given a mad dive into eternity.

McGrath found that he was sweating profusely, and his throat was dry. This business even had the Black Bat's tendency to vanish at will beat to a frazzle.

CHAPTER II
The Black Bat's Summons

IN one of the best sections of the city was a spacious estate with flower gardens, shrubs and a smooth green lawn. It was masked from the street by a series of thick foliage trees. A neatly lettered sign on the gate merely read:

ANTHONY QUINN

Inside the big house a slender, bald-headed man with a narrow face and quick little eyes was puttering around the reception hall. He wore a dark suit and bow tie, but he didn't look like a servant, even though he professed to be one. In fact "Silk" Kirby was a combination butler, chauffeur, valet and companion for a blind man.

There was a reason for his being in the hallway, too, because he kept looking out as if waiting for someone. He heard a car stop, a door slam, and then the front gate squealed. Silk saw a tall well-dressed man start down the walk to the front porch. Silk darted down the hall, turned into the study and tapped on the wall. Then he returned to the front door.

A section of the wall which Silk had tapped opened up, although no trace of that door could have been spotted by an expert in such matters. The man who emerged wore a smoking jacket, held a cane, and clenched a pipe between his teeth. He was sturdy-looking, with a body like an athlete's. His eyes were bright and pleasant—all except the skin which surrounded them. Something had burned deeply into Tony Quinn's face, and left horrible scars as a mocking, eternal remembrance.

The doorbell buzzed, and a strange thing happened. Tony Quinn's bright eyes turned dull. The whites showed preponderantly over what had been their former grayness. He walked slowly and stiffly toward the fireplace and a comfortable chair there. His movements were those of a totally blind man and—except to three people—Tony Quinn was blind. Utterly and forever. The best surgeons in the world had sworn to that.

Silk opened the front door, bowed slightly and greeted the caller.

"How do you do, sir. I expected to see Judge Leslie. Please excuse me if I seemed surprised!"

"Quite all right." The visitor smiled. "I'm Judge Leslie's law partner, Jim Charters. Mr. Quinn is home, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes sir," Silk replied, surreptitiously appraising this man. "Judge Leslie's phone call saw to that."

"Good."

Jim Charters, Silk decided with that knack for estimating people, was a good egg. The kind of a man who could be a firm friend, or a deadly enemy. He led the way to the study and announced him.

Tony Quinn did not arise. He merely thrust out his hand vaguely. Charters took it and Quinn smiled.

"Hello, Charters. Judge Leslie mentioned you several times, of course. What's up? Why didn't he come?"

Charters opened a cigarette case and proffered it to Quinn and then, with a wrinkle of annoyance on his face, put the case away. It was hard to realize that this man was blind until one looked into his eyes. Then there was no longer any doubt about Tony Quinn's affliction.

Charters sat down.

"I persuaded Leslie not to come, Mr. Quinn," he said. "I think I can explain the situation much better than he could under the circumstances. Something rather terrible has happened—to the Judge's son. You know young Bob, of course?"

QUINN nodded. His face was turned in Charters' direction, but his eyes seemed to be staring vacantly way over to the left.

"Yes. Bob's a good lad. Has the makings of a good attorney, too. Please tell me what's happened to him."

Charters took a long puff on his cigarette and exhaled noisily.

"It's not easy to tell, Quinn. I'll get to it gradually. Build up the case, as we do in court. First of all, Judge Leslie trusts you above all other men. He's frequently said that before you were—that is— Oh, you know what I'm driving at. Before you were blinded in Judge Leslie's court by those rotten gangsters. It's too bad they didn't hurl that acid on themselves instead of into your eyes.

"No—don't interrupt by trying to pass it all off. I'll get down to bedrock. If Judge Leslie ever needed an attorney—and lawyers do, of course—he'd hardly pick anyone but you. Even above me, his own law partner. But then of course I'm not a criminal lawyer, even if I was any good."

Quinn chuckled. "I've heard of you. That last Supreme Court appeal was a masterpiece, Charters.

Go on. Why in the world would Judge Leslie want a criminal lawyer?"

"It's about Bob. He set himself up in practice and has done very well indeed. Independent cuss too—refuses to accept any favors from the Judge or from me, for that matter. Now it seems that young Bob has got himself into a mess. As you know, all attorneys hear clients confess tales that would make an average man shudder. Like doctors and priests, we keep our clients' confidence at all times. We're immune from questioning on the witness stand by the same immunity that protects a doctor or a priest.

"Well, young Bob evidently listened to a good many such stories, and made notes of them. He also took from his clients whatever documentary evidence they had. Now—and listen to this—some of young Bob's clients have been approached, shown photostatic copies of this evidence and papers, and ordered to pay blackmail. The clients naturally think Bob is behind it."

"They don't know Bob, nor his father," Tony Quinn retorted quietly. "Go on."

"Well, it seems that a man named Sanders went to Bob for advice. He had been playing the market pretty heavily, helped himself to some cash from the firm where he works, and needed assistance pretty darned bad. Bob told him to sell everything he owned and make good the loss before it was discovered through audit. Bob arranged the sale of the man's house and several other pieces of property. The loss was made good.

"Now you'd say that man, Sanders, was a perfect set-up for blackmailers. He would have been, too, except for one thing. He took Bob's advice even further than most people might. He went to his employers, admitted what he had done, and was willing to face the consequences.

"Nobody knew that, not even Bob. So when the emissary of the blackmailer showed up, thrust his photostats into Sanders' face, the man simply blew up. He threw the emissary out on his ear, then rushed to Bob's office. Bob denied being connected with the job, but when he went to look for his papers on the case, they were missing!"

Quinn's head moved up and down.

"So Sanders then went to the police—for which I hardly blame him. What else, Charters? This is a pretty serious business."

"Of course it is." Charters lit another cigarette. "Bob checked on other records in similar cases and they were also gone. He went to see some of these clients and they almost tore his head off. Yes, they'd been blackmailed, and were shelling out. Late this afternoon the D.A. issued a warrant for Bob's arrest. It will be served any minute."

"Bad," Quinn said. "Very bad. What does Judge Leslie want me to do?"

CHARTERS closed his eyes as if resigned to an immediate rejection of the proposition he was about to offer.

"Leslie thinks you could defend his son, Quinn. In fact he begs you to do so. I'll add my own personal plea to that. And Quinn—think of this, too. Ever since you were blinded, you have taken no work. I know you're a wealthy man and you don't need the money, but for heaven's sake, why just mope around and give up? A lawyer doesn't need eyes. There are plenty of eyes to service him if necessary. All he needs is a canny instinct, in which you outdo any other attorney, and a smooth tongue. None of that acid got on your tongue, Tony Quinn. It didn't sear into your brain and rob you of what you learned during those years at school. You owe it to yourself to come into this case. Will you?"

Quinn leaned back and tamped down the tobacco in his pipe. He fumbled on the table for a match, but Charters quickly applied flame to the pipe. Quinn drew on it, blowing smoke slowly through his pursed lips.

"It's odd," he said finally, "that something like this should break. For quite some time, Charters, I have considered going back into practice. A limited practice of course, but it would take my mind off—well—things. Suppose I Ú Someone is coming up the walk."

The doorbell buzzed again. Charters looked a bit amazed. "Now how in the world did you guess—"

"I didn't," Quinn smiled. "My hearing has improved. Sort of a recompense for the loss of my eyes, I suppose. I can even tell you who is on the porch. It's a friend. Captain McGrath of the police."

McGrath came striding down the hallway, turned into the room and glared at Silk who was at his side and glaring back. McGrath looked around.

"Where's young Leslie?" he demanded. "They told me at the judge's office he was here. I've got a warrant for him."

"But he isn't here, Captain," Quinn said. "Sit down, Mac. Cool off. You're excited as a kid going to his first movie. I can't see you, but I can still tell."

"Says you," McGrath grumbled. "Okay, I am excited. You'd be, too, if you'd gone through what I have today. I... Who's your friend?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Quinn said. "Captain McGrath, meet Attorney Jim Charters. He's a law partner of Judge Leslie's. He's quite trustworthy, so you can talk."

"Glad to know you," McGrath mumbled formally as he shook hands. "I suppose you're seeing Quinn about the judge's son, eh? Quinn, I'll tell you what happened today. Even the newspapers haven't got the whole story. It's that bank job. There's more to it than you can read in the papers. The teller said an invisible man did the job. Somebody knifed a guard

and there wasn't anybody close enough to wield the knife. Another guy says he felt somebody he couldn't see pass by him, and I—well, maybe I'm goofy, too, but I watched the teller fall over the edge of the roof and he certainly acted as if he was pushed. There wasn't anybody else on the roof except me—and him."

TONY QUINN'S face lighted up for a moment, then relaxed into its normal, serious expression. His eyes never flickered once.

"Rather an amazing experience. Captain, but Bob Leslie happens to concern us even more. What brought you here looking for him?"

McGrath sighed. "I called the judge's office and they told me he was here. I figured the boy would be with him."

Charters broke in. "The judge was coming here, Captain, but I persuaded him to go straight home. Bob is there. I'll take you to him. He's quite ready to surrender. Shall we go now?"

"Sure. You go on ahead. I've got my own car. I want to talk to Quinn for awhile. Just see that Bob Leslie is there when I arrive."

Silk escorted Charters to the door. McGrath pulled a chair closer to where Tony Quinn sat and dropped his voice.

"Don't tell me," he suggested, "that you're going to defend Bob Leslie?"

"But I am, Captain. Most decidedly I am. In fact I'm looking forward to getting back into harness. It's pretty dull just being a blind man, you know."

"Yeah—must be. But I was just thinking that—well, the Black Bat won't pass out when you become a lawyer again, will he?"

Quinn laughed long and loudly.

"Captain, I thought we'd settled that for once and all time. You brought in your own doctors who examined my eyes. Don't you take anybody's word for it that I'm really blind and couldn't possibly be the Black Bat? And then—why, you actually sound worried that the Bat might cease to exist. I thought you wanted to nab him."

"I do," McGrath growled. "And how I do! But if he quits, what chance will I have? And like I said, this business at the bank—"

"Come now,"—Quinn chuckled—"what you are really getting at is an invitation for the Black Bat to enter this case. But why come to me, a blind man? Sometimes I think I ought to get myself a connection with this Black Bat so I can relay to him certain facts that you see fit to give me. Another thing, Captain, isn't it possible that the Bat will enter the case without your asking him? He seems to get around, and he may even know the true circumstances of what happened at the bank today."

"Yeah," McGrath sighed. "I suppose so. Well—I've got to pinch young Leslie. Hate to do it on account of his father. Swell guy, the judge. If there was any way I could put in a fix—"

"You wouldn't," Quinn told him. "Not you. Perhaps you can temper the reach of the law with a certain amount of humanity, but when a man breaks the law you'll get him if it takes you a lifetime. As you want to get the Black Bat. Good evening, Captain. If the Black Bat should fly in here some night, I'll give him your kind regards."

McGrath went to the door. Silk helped him on with his coat, proffered his hat and let it drop just as McGrath reached for it. The detective didn't move.

Silk didn't either—just stood there smiling complacently.

"Sorry, sir, you fumbled your hat, sir. I'd pick it up, but I've got the darndest crick in my back. And I can't seem to bend down."

McGrath bent down and Silk's foot automatically went out. Then he seemed to think better of it, stepped to the door and let the detective pass through.

Silk's smile faded as he hurried into the study.

There was something of colossal importance on Silk's mind.

CHAPTER III
Quartette of Crime Fighters

WELL, Silk,"—Quinn rubbed his hands—"you heard what Charters wanted. I'm going back into practice. It will seem good, provided opposition lawyers and juries don't sympathize because I'm supposed to be blind."

"Yes, sir, I heard it all," Silk admitted. "I don't mind saying it has me worried, too. If you go back into practice, will there be time for this other—sideline? That is—"

"You're wondering whether or not the Black Bat will fade out of the scene? No, Silk. Not at all. I'll only take cases that appeal to me. Mostly people who haven't much money and are in serious trouble. Just to prove it may I suggest that you contact Carol and Butch at once? Tell them to report via the tunnel. Captain McGrath proffered a most interesting problem. An invisible crook, a robbery, a murder and an apparent suicide. McGrath will get his wish, because the Black Bat is going to spread his wings again."

Quinn sat back in quiet contemplation of what he had to do. Those eyes of his still seemed to be blind, but he could put life back into them at will.

Tony Quinn really had been blind for months. That acid of which Charters had spoken had seared his eyes to such an extent that surgeons pronounced his case hopeless. Undaunted, Quinn had developed other senses. His hearing was keen as a dog's. His

sense of touch was almost unbelievable and, in inky darkness, a remarkable thing occurred. Quinn's healed eyes could see in darkness, as well as in daylight. He could even distinguish colors.

His recovery had come about when Carol Baldwin, pretty and vivacious, had come to see him when he had actually been blind. Through her, his sight had been restored by a little known doctor in a small town, a doctor who had since died. Carol's own policeman father, who was dying, had offered his own eyes to replace Quinn's and this clever doctor had performed an operation that was practically a miracle. But it was not until after the operation that Quinn had learned that the eye donor had been Carol Baldwin's father, who had suffered a fatal wound from gangsters who had shot him in the back while he had been on police duty. As Officer Baldwin's dying gesture he had determined to give Tony Quinn his eyes in the hope that this able young, former district attorney would use them in fighting crime.

Since then Quinn had pretended still to be blind. Everyone thought he was. He adopted a black hood and a cape with ribbed wings attached to it—like the wings of a bat—as his trademark. Clad in this disguise, he foraged in the underworld, fought crooks and killers with their own brand of ruthlessness. His trained mind solved cases. Often he used a laboratory hidden off this study where he now sat. It was equipped with all manner of devices for studying evidence and clues.

Silk Kirby had come to Quinn's house one night to rob. Quinn had talked to him and, instead of robbing, he had become the Black Bat's second confidant.

Carol Baldwin had insisted that she be allowed to join the Bat's ranks, and she had proved to be resourceful and clever.

Then the third member of the Black Bat's group had come into the picture. "Butch" O'Leary was a huge man with mighty muscles and a rare courage. An ex-prize fighter, an act of Tony Quinn's had earned his undying devotion.

Butch didn't possess Silk Kirby's smoothness, for Silk had once been a confidence man, and his suavity had gained for him the nickname of Silk. Plenty of people had fallen for Silk's line and had believed that by turning a bit crooked themselves they would fall into huge sums of easily won money. Instead, Silk had walked out of their lives, and so had the fortunes they had entrusted to him, hoping for something like a ten thousand percent return. Silk always maintained that victims of confidence men have as much larceny in their souls as the crook himself....

TONY QUINN glanced out of the window and saw that it was dusk. Time for the Black Bat to soar.

McGRATH

But first there was Bob Leslie. He had to speak with him, arrange for bail and get all details of the case.

Quinn never believed, for an instant, that young Leslie had sold the secrets of his clients to blackmailers. He was pretty sure he could convince a judge of this, too—when he knew the facts. Meanwhile, this business at the bank had to be investigated.

Tony Quinn arose, used his cane to tap a path across the room, because he always gave the illusion of being blind. Silk came in and drew the shades. Then Quinn's dead-looking eyes came back to life. He strode straight to the hidden door and entered his lab.

Carol Baldwin arose and stepped close to him. He looked down at her clear eyes and smiled back.

"Hello, Carol. Lovely as ever, and just as eager to get into a scrap, aren't you?"

"The first part I won't say," she tossed back at him. "For the last part—yes. Is something brewing, Tony?"

"It's boiled over," Quinn said. He looked past Carol and grinned at the giant who bobbed his head eagerly. "Butch looks as though he's ready for action too. Well, I think we'll all get it."

He rapidly sketched what McGrath had told him. Carol whistled in surprise.

"An invisible crook! Of course that's impossible, Tony, but darned interesting just the same. I wonder how it was pulled off?"

"Yeah," Butch put in, "I'd like to meet an

invisible man. Never saw one before."

Silk let out a hoarse laugh and Butch frowned a little. Then he caught on and joined in the laughter.

"Now, here is our first move." Tony Quinn said. "The bank clerk who fell, jumped, or was pushed off that rooftop must have known more than he pretended. Unless—and keep this in mind—some crafty brain really has figured out a way to make a man invisible. We'll assume the dead clerk did know something, so the investigation must start with him. I'll need his background, every little detail of his life.

"Carol, you've posed as a newspaper reporter before. Go to this clerk's home first, question his people. Talk to neighbors, his employers, anybody who knows him. Take Butch along. Just in case you stick that pretty head of yours into a hornet's nest. Meanwhile I'll do some checking on what happened at the bank. Unless I'm very wrong. Commissioner Warner will come down and hint that the Black Bat ought to get going. He is by no means sure I'm the Bat, but he guesses so."

"And hopes so." Carol smiled. "He's not like McGrath, after your hide every minute. I'll start now, Tony. As soon as I learn enough, Butch and I will come back. Shouldn't take much more than two or three hours."

She turned and walked to a trapdoor in the floor of the lab. Butch had already vanished into its depths. Now his great arms came out and gently lifted Carol down. They progressed along the tunnel and came out in one of the garden houses far to the rear of the big house. There was a gate nearby, and since it overlooked a quiet, street, there was no one to see them slip out.

"We'll use your car, Butch," Carol said. "It's only routine business, but just the same you're a comforting person to have around."

Butch grinned amiably. "I've seen times when the Bat was a lot more comforting. Say—do you suppose there really is a man who can make himself invisible?"

"On the surface I'd say it was impossible," Carol said, "but strange things happen these days, Butch. If it is true, we've probably got the toughest fight of our lives just coming up. You get the car and meet me on the next corner. I want to pick up a newspaper and find out where this dead teller lived."

WHEN Butch picked up Carol, be drove straight out to the dead teller's home. The bungalow in which Roy Banton had lived was a nice place with neat homes all around. Butch pulled to the curb and Carol got out.

"I don't see how anything can possibly happen," she said. "You stay here while I talk to Banton's father. His mother is dead, and he had no one else, so I think the father will talk all right. He's home. I saw lights in the house. Just watch the place and listen. I'll yell if I need you."

Carol punched the doorbell and when the senior Banton, a slender, hawk-faced man, let her in, Carol explained what she wanted.

"I'm not a crime reporter, Mr. Banton. My editor sent me here to get all the angles on your son. We don't think he was mixed up in this mess, and we don't believe he committed suicide—as the other papers indicate."

"Thank heavens, somebody doesn't consider Roy a crook. Yes, I'll tell you all about him. Anything you wish to know."

Carol poised a pencil above her pad. Her eyes measured this man, and somehow she didn't like him. His son had died violently only a few hours before, and yet here he sat as calmly as though he had never heard of Roy Banton. Fathers didn't act this way under such circumstances.

Carol's eyes flashed toward the floor and fastened on the left trouser leg of her host. He wore a light suit, and there were several dark stains on the material. Stains that not only could have been blood, but actually looked like it.

"Just tell me his age, how long he worked at the bank, and what his hobbies were," she suggested, and stifled an urge to get up and race out of this house, away from this man's presence.

He gave her these details readily, and even offered a cigarette which she refused. Finally Carol thought she had asked enough and arose. She shook hands with the man and almost shuddered at the tightness of his handclasp and the oily chill of it.

He followed her into the front hall. Carol started to turn around and thank him for the last time. She heard a sudden movement and then a thick, velvet drape enveloped her head. She tried to cry out, but a hand was clapped across her mouth so hard that it rattled her teeth.

Strong, merciless fingers sought her throat and fastened around it. She was half smothered by the drape. She couldn't yell for help, she couldn't struggle, for those relentless fingers had only to squeeze a little harder and it would be all over.

"Clever, my dear," the man said in a low voice. "Extremely clever, but you saw the spots of blood on my trousers. Unfortunate—for you. Come now, who are you, really? Who sent you? Don't tell me you're a policewoman. I might add that you didn't fool me once. I'm a bit too clever for you."

Carol didn't answer him. She was just waiting for a chance either to yell her lungs out in an appeal to Butch, or use her fists or feet. Carol was no slouch when it came to fighting, but with a drape over her head, and hands grasping her throat, there was little she could do.

"Very well," her captor said. "You'll talk later on. We're going places, my dear. I don't know if anyone came with you, but we'll not take chances. I have a car at the rear and we'll go to it now. That's a gun pushing against your ribs. If you call out or try to run, I'll have to crack your skull with the butt of it. Now please walk. Take my arm and I'll see that you don't stumble."

CAROL'S position was not quite hopeless. Butch would be waiting, and if he saw a car come out of the drive, he would surely follow it. Carol wondered what those bloodstains meant. Who had smeared them on this man's trouser leg? The real father of that dead bank teller probably. Carol shivered. This captor of hers looked like a man who had never heard of kindness or mercy.

She was led out the back door and the man closed and locked it quietly. He cautioned her once more, and a minute later Carol climbed into the front seat of a car. She was completely blinded by the drape and with a gun pressed against her side every moment she realized how foolish it would be to try and escape.

"You're obeying my orders quite well," her captor said. "So well, in fact, that I think someone must be on guard outside Banton's home. So we'll just plow up a few hedges and try a trick or two."

Carol didn't know what he meant, but she would have realized the cunning this man displayed if she had known. He started the motor, turned the wheel and sent the car through a hedge, crossed the lawn of a house next door and kept on going until the car rolled over another hedge and entered still another yard two houses away from Banton's place.

The man turned down this driveway, shielded his face by yanking down his hat brim, and paid no attention to the residents of these houses who came out to see what had happened.

Butch, parked well up the street, saw the car in his rear view mirror, as it shot out of the drive and turned in the opposite direction. He got out quickly and noted the license plate, writing down the figures. Of course it was impossible for Carol to have been in that car, but Butch didn't like the way it had left the drive on two wheels.

He became more and more worried as the minutes went by. Finally, Butch marched up on the porch of Banton's house and rang the bell. When nobody came, he pounded on the door. Finally he placed his shoulder against the heavy door, took a quick breath, and the door flew open with pieces of the lock falling on the floor.

There was no one on the first floor, but Butch spotted Carol's note pad laying on the corner of a table. He thrust this into his pocket. Of course Carol must have been in that car which left in such a hurry. Butch headed for the telephone to check the ownership, hoping against hope that it wouldn't prove to be stolen.

Halfway across the room Butch brought himself up short. From somewhere upstairs came a dismal, heart-rending groan.

CHAPTER IV
Impossible Crimes

OFFICE workers were already on the streets and it was within half an hour of closing time for the big stores. On one of the most important avenues, the Merwin Jewelry House basked in the glory of a reputation built up over a hundred and ten years.

Here were gems that had been picked from the finest the world over. Great vaults kept them secure. Customers were wealthy people, and prices in Merwin's started well up into the thousands.

Martin Deering had worked at Merwin's for many years. He was a slender, sleek little man with a fawning personality that could sell jewels. The window displays were being removed by one of the minor clerks and Deering reflected that he had done that for seven years before his promotion. Now he was senior clerk and trusted implicitly.

The door opened and a man walked in. Deering sized him up and smiled in approval. Deering could detect the difference between a thirty-dollar suit and a hundred-dollar one better than a tailor could.

There were four other people in the store. Two were Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, whom Deering knew well. The other pair were a middle-aged man and a woman of about the same age. They were looking at engagement rings, and they had considerable class.

"Yes, sir." Deering bowed to the new arrival. "Something I can show you?"

"Yes. I'm Dr. Rowland. It's my fifth wedding anniversary, and I want something really nice. The price doesn't matter."

"A necklace, perhaps?" Deering suggested. "We have a dozen splendid ones. The prices begin at sixty thousand. Ahem—you did mention that the price—"

"Quite all right." Dr. Rowland waved one hand impatiently. "Let's have a look."

Deering went into the vault and emerged with a large tray, about four inches thick. He raised a lid and revealed an eye-startling display of gems. There were diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The total carat weight of all the stones was tremendous, and so was their aggregate worth. Dr. Rowland grunted in surprise, and picked up one of the necklaces.

"That is the cheapest one, sir." Deering leaned further over the counter. "Let me point out to you that fifteen-carat ruby. It has a unique history, sir. I

... What was that?"

"What was what?" Rowland asked.

Deering shrugged. "I thought I felt somebody brush against me, but I must have been imagining things. May I ask if you are interested in that necklace, sir?"

"Yes," Rowland replied. "I am. Looks like the very thing."

Deering smiled some more. "Take it to the window, sir. Let the fading daylight flash against those jewels. They'll dazzle you—I promise that."

Rowland seemed a little annoyed at Deering's manner, but he walked over to a window and held the string of gems into the light. They really did take a man's breath away. What they would do to a woman—

Then Deering, still behind the counter, gave a sudden bleat of alarm and began hopping up and down like a monkey.

"The necklaces—they've disappeared! They're gone!"

ROWLAND reached the counter in three long strides. Deering made a dive and pressed his foot against an alarm bell. The grilled steel gates at the door quietly closed into place and electric mechanism locked them. All other doors in the place were similarly locked. When an alarm button in Merwin's Jewelry House was stepped on, things happened.

Rowland looked at the tray of jewels and gaped. They were gone! Eleven necklaces worth more than sixty thousand dollars each, had completely vanished. Deering half sobbed, half raved behind the counter. Rowland hastily laid down the necklace he held as if it had become too hot to touch. Deering swept it out of sight.

"They were there one second and gone the next," he cried. "Someone in this store has them. Someone must have them! Call the police and the detectives! What's the matter with the cops? Don't they think that alarm bell means business?"

Apparently the cops did, for a radio car jumped the curb and came to a stop with its hood almost touching the grilled doors. Two patrolmen jumped out. Other police, attracted from traffic posts and nearby beats, came rushing up. The manager of the store pressed a hidden button and the electrically locked doors opened. The two radio policemen, burly and efficient, took charge.

"Is anything missing?" one asked.

"Is anything missing?" Deering raved. "Thousands of dollars worth of jewels! Millions of dollars—"

"Shut up," one snapped. "Talk sense. Was it a stick-up?"

"No! No—it just happened..."

"Excuse me," Dr. Rowland cut in. "This clerk is too excited to talk. Don't blame him much. I was looking at a necklace, one of several on that empty tray you can see. I walked over to the window and the clerk suddenly began yowling."

"Elevate 'em, mister!" the cop said. "We'll frisk you first."

Rowland raised his arms and permitted the police to search him. They found no jewels.

"Listen," one of the radio patrolmen said, "this is a job for the Bureau. Where's a phone?"

He went behind the counter, pushed Deering out of the way and picked up a telephone. It fell out of his hand, clattered to the floor and he fumbled around for a few seconds. Then he glared at the people who watched him and dialed Headquarters angrily.

"We need detectives at Merwin's Jewelry House," he said gruffly. "Big job—and a clean one, too."

He went back to the aisle in front of the counters.

"We'll begin by blocking off the streets," he announced. "Somebody snitched the stuff and got out, somehow. The crook may try a getaway in a car, so we'll just put stop to that. Let's go, Jack!"

The other radio officer followed his mate to the door. Other patrolmen came in to take over until the detectives arrived. More radio cars, answering the alarm, went off to block roads too. Deering sat down on a stool and wrung his hands.

"I can't understand it! I can't! The necklaces were within three inches of my fingertips. Then they disappeared—just like magic. Like somebody I couldn't see standing beside me, and just taking them."

"That's peculiar," the woman who had been examining engagement rings, broke in. "I was near the door when these officers arrived. They left the doors open for a minute and I could have sworn somebody passed right by me. Someone I couldn't see. It was like a breeze, made by a man in a hurry."

HALF an hour later Captain McGrath stormed into the place. He almost sensed what witnesses would tell him. Deering explained what had happened. The woman told of the feeling that someone passed by her. McGrath bit completely through his cigar.

"All right," he announced. "This business about somebody you couldn't see is to be kept strictly quiet. No interviews to newspapers, understand? Don't even mention such an idea. In the first place, everybody will think you've gone goofy, and in the next place it will create a wave of panic. Which is what we don't want."

Rowland, the doctor-customer, faced McGrath.

"Do you mean to tell me something like this has happened before—that an invisible person is suspected of pulling criminal jobs?"

"That's what I mean," McGrath snapped. "And that's all I'll say about it, too.... You—" he faced Deering—"what's your name and position in this store?"

"Deering—that's my name. Martin Deering. I've worked here for thirteen and one-half years. Nothing like this ever happened before. The jewels were right in the display box. They were too valuable to be left lying in a regular floor showcase and we always stored them in the vault until a customer professed an interest for gems of that type. I brought them out. Dr. Rowland can tell you they were all in the case, because he selected one of them. I watched him admire the necklace over there by the window. Of course my eyes were off the other gems, but they were practically under my very nose. I happened to glance down—and they were gone."

"He's not exaggerating," Dr. Rowland put in. "I know it may sound silly, but that's precisely what happened."

McGrath was thinking of that bank clerk who had been robbed in almost the same manner as Deering.

"Deering," McGrath said, "you're under arrest as a material witness. I'm not making any charges, mind. It's for your own protection. This morning a bank teller was robbed as you were just now. I think he was murdered later on, so we'll just make certain nothing happens to you."

Deering jumped when McGrath said the word "murder." He backed away a little, and chewed on his lower lip. Little nerves in his temples began to throb. McGrath noticed that, and reached for his handcuffs.

Suddenly Deering made a grab beneath the counter and his hand appeared, holding a small calibre automatic—a .25, McGrath figured.

"Don't come a step nearer," Deering said softly. "No one else in the store except McGrath and Dr. Rowland noticed this episode. You'll be a dead man if you try to touch me, officer. Just stand right where you are."

McGrath's eyes were narrowed and his whole body tense. He realized that Deering was too nervous to jump his gun. Anyway the crazy clerk hadn't the slightest chance of escaping. The whole area was surrounded.

Deering backed up until be reached the door marked "Private." This was where the president of the firm maintained his quarters. Deering opened the door without taking his eyes off McGrath. He stepped inside the office, slammed the door and *quickly bolted it.*

McGrath ran to the front door and yelled orders for the rear and sides of the store to be carefully watched. Then he walked up to the office door and banged on it.

"Deering," he said, "I'm coming in. There's no sense in adding murder to whatever crime you've committed. Put down that gun and listen to reason. In half a minute I'll blast the lock off if you don't open up."

TEN seconds of the allotted thirty went by and then the roar of a gun made McGrath's nerves twitch. He didn't wait any longer. Pressing the muzzle of his gun against the lock he blazed away three times and shattered the mechanism. He pushed open the door, gun muzzle slightly elevated so he could draw down on a target fast.

Then he thrust the gun into his pocket and dashed to the middle of the office. Deering lay there. The front of his face seemed to have been blown away.

"He's dead all right," McGrath said. "Couldn't take it. Suicide!"

Dr. Rowland stepped closer and grimaced at the gory sight.

"Excuse me, Captain. I'm not an expert in your line, but I do know a little about guns. This man has a .25 calibre automatic in his fist. No bullet of that small size would have messed him up like that. And where's the empty shell? Automatics eject them. It should be on the floor."

McGrath wrapped a handkerchief around the muzzle of Deering's little gun, gently worked it free of those dead fingers and then he sniffed of the barrel. Finally, he ejected the cartridge clip.

"You're right. Doctor," he said ruefully. "Should have noticed it myself. This gun hasn't been fired, and no bullets are missing from the clip. But if somebody else killed Deering, how'd he get out of this room?"

McGrath walked over and examined the two windows. They were not only locked but equipped with burglar alarms and special devices to insure against forcing them open from outside.

There was one door. Two heavy burglar chains and a two-inch-thick steel bar reposed in heavy sockets. This could he raised with a sort of latch affair. The main lock on the door was the usual spring type which would snap shut when the door closed.

"Nobody got through those windows," McGrath growled. "And if anybody came in by way of the door he passed right through the keyhole. I don't get this set-up. Somebody plugged Deering, and whoever did it certainly got clean away from here, murder gun and all. But how?"

Dr. Rowland had a peculiar expression on his face.

"You'll probably think I'm crazy now, but—you *shot the lock off the door, remember? You pushed* it open and walked in. I was, perhaps, ten seconds behind you, and as I headed for the door I distinctly felt *something* pass close by me. I think I also heard a low laugh. Not a pleasant laugh either, but one of triumphant and well sated satisfaction. Captain, are we all candidates for the psychiatrist?"

McGrath chewed a fresh cigar into ribbons.

"Let me meet one more case like this," he said slowly, "and I'll run, not walk, to the nearest booby hatch. I don't believe in ghosts, or in guys who make themselves invisible, but I do believe what my eyes see. A man who looked as if he'd been pushed off the roof of a building. Another man who locked himself in a room is murdered there and nothing human could have got out of it. In a minute I'll be asking you to prescribe a sedative, Doc."

Rowland shook his head. "I'm a dentist, not an M.D., and what's more I could use something like that myself. Only the kind I'd enjoy comes in bottles."

CHAPTER V
Butch Takes the Trail

BUTCH O'LEARY went up the stairs of that little house three at a time. The groans were repeated and he easily located the room from which they originated. No one was there.

Seeing a closet, Butch hurried to it and tried the door. It was locked, and the key had been removed. Butch banged on the panels and another groan indicated that someone was inside. Taking a grip on the knob, Butch tugged. The knob broke away. He doubled one great fist, shoved it into a mass of wadded cloth he picked up from the bed and with a single punch smashed the panel of the door.

He widened the hole quickly and in a few moments found that he was able to worry the bolt free of its socket. He swung the door open, reached inside, and lifted up a white-haired man whose face was bloody. His wrists and ankles were tied cruelly. Butch cut him loose, eased him into a comfortable position on the bed and went into the bathroom to get a glass of water.

He grunted at the shambles in the sink. It seemed that almost every medicine bottle from the cabinet above had been smashed. Butch got the water and in a short time the victim could talk.

"As if enough hasn't happened in one day!" he groaned. "My son was killed this morning. They say he robbed the bank and committed suicide, but I know that's wrong. Then about an hour ago a man came to see me. He said he was from the insurance company, so I let him in. He hit me on the head, tied me up and then practically tore the house apart. First he tackled the medicine cabinet and he smashed lots of bottles into pieces. He cursed plenty, too, because whatever he was looking for wasn't there."

"Who was the guy?" Butch asked. "You know him?"

"Never saw him before in my life," the elder Banton said. "I don't even know what he wanted."

Butch ambled back into the bathroom, opened the medicine cabinet door and tried to figure out why someone would want to smash all the bottles. He noticed that bottles containing pills had not been touched. There was an envelope on one shell and he examined this. It was hall full of white tablets.

"Aspirin," Banton said. He had managed to reach Butch's side. "Roy—he was my son—had a bottle of sedative. He couldn't sleep nights lately. Two nights ago he accidentally broke the neck off the sedative bottle, so he emptied the aspirin into the envelope and poured the sedative into the aspirin bottle. See—there it is."

Butch took down a dark-colored bottle labeled "Aspirin." Banton wasn't lying. The bottle was almost full of liquid.

"Seems to me," Butch said thoughtfully, "that the guy who busted all these bottles was trying to get rid of some liquid medicine, because he didn't touch any of the pills. He must have figured this bottle contained pills, too. Listen, Mr. Banton, when you were locked in the closet, could you hear anybody talking downstairs?"

"Yes—yes I could. I couldn't make out what was said, but there seemed to be a woman talking. Then I heard a funny kind of sound, like a muffled scream."

Butch went to a back window and peered out. He saw the knocked-down hedge, saw neighbors inspecting the damage done to their lawns by the kidnapper's car, and knew that the sedan he had seen streak out of the driveway below Banton's house must have contained the kidnapper and Carol.

BUTCH went downstairs, picked up a phone, and called the Motor Vehicle Division. Without an iota of a blush he identified himself as Captain McGrath and asked for the owner of a car bearing the license plate he had seen on the kidnapper's sedan. Back came the response in less than two minutes.

"It's a black sedan listed under the name of Hartwell Proctor who gave his address as 1901 Broadview Terrace."

"Thanks," Butch said and leaned back.

What to do? He knew the Black Bat should be notified, but there wasn't time to go to Tony Quinn's house, and the orders were that phone calls should not be made unless there was a dire emergency. The emergency was present all right, Butch knew, but he reasoned that he should be able to take care of his business for the present anyway.

Maybe—and the chances were good—the car or plates had been stolen and the trail would end abruptly. Butch decided to visit this Hartwell Proctor.

He told Banton to make sure nothing was missing

from the house and to get together all of his dead son's papers. Banton, who had listened to Butch identify himself as Captain McGrath, was pathetically eager to help this man he believed to be a law officer of high rank. Butch returned to his car and drove straight to Broadview Terrace. He located the number and whistled softly, for the place must be that of a wealthy man. There was a big garage at the rear.

Butch parked his car, glad it had become dark, and crept along the driveway to the garage. He entered easily and saw a roadster occupying a part of the floor. There was room for two more cars. The roadster was stone cold and hadn't been driven for hours. Little pools of fresh oil indicated that another car was stored in the garage.

There were stairs leading to the second floor, and there Butch found two neat rooms—chauffeur's quarters, for there were trade magazines, an extra uniform, and a kit of expensive tools there.

Butch began opening bureau drawers and in one, buried underneath a pile of fresh linen, he discovered a .32 calibre automatic, fully loaded, with a bullet in the firing chamber. Butch extracted the slugs and threw them out a back window.

He saw a framed picture standing on the bureau and picked it up, nodding in approval, for the picture was that of an unusually pretty girl, in a dancing costume. He turned the pictured around. On the back was a photographer's name and, written in ink, the words:

Elite Dance Hall Set

Fumbling in the spare clothing he found matches advertising the same club, and giving its address. This chauffeur certainly frequented the place. Then Butch quickly doused the lights, because he heard a car rolling down the drive.

The garage doors were opened, the car was driven in, and Butch heard someone mumbling to himself. The garage doors were closed again and the tramp of feet on the staircase indicated that the chauffeur was earning up to his quarters. Butch sat down and waited.

The lights flashed on, and for a moment or two the chauffeur was not aware of his visitor. He threw his hat on the bed, removed his coat and hurled that onto a chair.

He was a young fellow, good-looking and broad-shouldered. But Butch did not like his eyes. They were smoldering fires of hate. A little self-contempt was there too, but Butch did not recognize that.

SUDDENLY the chauffeur turned and looked squarely at Butch. A startled gasp emanated from his lips.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"Suppose I'm a cop," Butch said, "and suppose your car was seen at a certain place not long ago. Brother, you better talk fast. You're in a spot."

Butch lifted a white-haired man who had been tied cruelly.

"So it's come this fast, huh?" The chauffeur went over to the bureau. "Mind if I get a cigarette, Officer?"

He whirled around all of a sudden and the automatic was in his hand.

"Okay—I knew this was bound to happen. Nobody is clever enough to outwit the cops forever, but I'm not taking any rap. Stick your hands up, and so help me if you go for your gun, I'll let you have it."

Butch got up slowly. "Put down that gun." he said ominously, "unless you want me to slap you and the gun down, too."

The chauffeur was deathly pale, but determined, too. Butch took one step and the gun clicked. Butch moved fast then. One powerful paw slapped the gun out of the chauffeur's grasp and Butch's left hand grabbed the man by the throat. He lifted him completely off the floor, threw him on the bed, but still clung to that throat.

"Where'd you take that girl?" Butch thundered. "Talk, or you'll never talk again, brother. I'll wring that bum neck of yours for good."

The chauffeur's terror was plain, but he didn't try to speak. Butch let go of his throat for a second.

"I'll tell you where you took her—to the Elite Club. Am I right?"

The man didn't have to answer. The utter dejection in his eyes told the story. He squirmed and struggled, but he didn't shout for help. Butch hit him on the point of the jaw, then calmly tied the man up. He put him beneath the bed covers, brushed his hands, and went downstairs. There was a phone on the wall, probably connected with the kitchen in the house.

Butch removed the receiver and a woman's voice answered.

"Get me outside," Butch said.

He asked the operator for information, got the number of Banton's house and the old man answered.

"I just left your house," Butch said. "Remember? Okay—now listen carefully. You'll have a visitor pretty soon. He'll ask about me. Tell him things didn't turn out so well—that his friend is in a lot of trouble and that I'm getting her out if I can. Tell him a guy named Proctor has a chauffeur who ain't so dumb either, and I'm on my way to the Elite Club. Got that? Good—and thanks."

Butch didn't dare call Tony Quinn's home. Not through a phone system that went via the house phones. There wasn't time to reach an outside phone either. Now that Butch knew where Carol had been taken, he was eager to get to the place and free her.

He knew that the Bat would miss Carol and him, would follow their trail and start with Banton's house. Butch left a wide open trail from there.

CHAPTER VI
The Invisible Leader

RETURNING to his car without being spotted from the big house, Butch glanced at the pack of matches bearing the address of the club. He wondered what kind of joint it would turn out to be, but he hardly expected what he found.

The Club Elite was a taxi dance hall on the second floor of a none too prepossessing building far downtown. Butch walked up the steps, wincing at the discordant music that was piped down to an amplifier in the small hallway to attract customers. If the place was as bad as the orchestra, Butch promised himself one swell time wrecking it.

A row of hostesses eyed him speculatively, but none of them arose. Butch looked just a little too big to be a comfortable dancing partner. This suited Butch very well indeed. He made his way to the bar at the further end of the hall, ordered beer, and surveyed the crowd. They were mostly riff-raff.

He saw two well-dressed men enter, wave aside the offers of the hostesses, and while one of them leaned nonchalantly against the wall, the other threaded his way across the dance floor and entered a door covered with red portieres.

Two minutes later, the second man followed that same course.

Then, within the space of no more than fifteen minutes, Butch counted seven more new arrivals who certainly were not interested in dancing. They were much better dressed than the usual patrons too.

Butch paid his check, ambled back to the entrance and took one last look at the place. He didn't see two sleek young men with pomaded hair and cynical expressions on their narrow faces, dodge out of sight. Butch went outside, moved into an alley and reached the rear of the building. He was no coward and could ordinarily handle three or four tough eggs at the same time.

But neither was Butch a fool. Nine men had gone to the rear portion of the building. and nine were too many even for his physical prowess. Then, too, he had to think of Carol. If he blundered into the wrong place, they might stop him long enough to whisk her to another hiding place.

A fire-escape running up the side of the building, and lighted windows just off the fourth landing attracted Butch's attention. He took a quick look around, then hoisted himself onto the fire-escape. Moving softly, for a man of his size, he reached the fourth landing and tried to look through the windows, but they were curtained.

He stuck a thick finger against the lower sash and grinned when he discovered the window was

not locked. He pushed it open about an inch—gently, so that it made no sound. The orchestra noises reached him, but they were muted. He heard no voices so he raised the window all the way, pushed aside the curtains and threw one leg over the sill.

Then he let out a roar, for two men barged into the room. Both had guns and looked as if they were ready to use them. Butch, straddling the sill, was in a rather helpless position, but he thought fast. The pull cord of the window shade kept brushing against his neck.

The two gunmen approached, carelessly now, for they were sure of themselves.

Butch raised his hands slowly. He grabbed the pull and gave it a terrific yank.

The shade came down, roller and all, and as it did, Butch hurled the thing straight into the faces of the approaching men.

HE dodged back to the fire-escape landing and started to go down. Then he stopped. Two more men were coming up, guns pointed his way. Butch gave a long sigh and surrendered. They forced him to climb back into the room and all four of them faced him.

"Boy," one said. "Proctor's chauffeur sure wasn't kidding when he said the guy was a giant. Okay, Goliath—lift 'em while we frisk you. And remember—you may be big but a little bit of a bullet will stop you as quick as it will a midget."

Butch knew this. Now he had to wait for an opportunity and stall. The longer he could keep these birds guessing, the more chance for the Black Bat to close in.

They searched Butch minutely and then, with a pair of guns jammed against his spine, he was forced out of the room, along a hall and down one flight of steps. When he turned into another room, he almost gave himself away. Carol was seated in a chair. She simply looked up at him as though he were an utter stranger. But he could see that she hadn't been harmed beyond the fact that her hair was disheveled.

"Dames in the mob too, huh?" Butch grunted.

One of the sleek men cursed softly. "I figured these two would know each other, but I guess they don't. Now we got two problems to solve."

He strutted over to where Carol sat.

"Listen, Beautiful, I don't want to have to push that pretty face of yours in, but so help me, unless you talk, I'll do it."

"Try," Carol said simply, and something told this little rat that he might have a difficult time.

He swiveled around to bluster at Butch, took a look at his prisoner's gigantic paws, and gulped.

"Keep them here," he told the others, "while I see somebody. The right thing to do is knock both of 'em off now, then find out who they are after."

When he returned, a portly, middle-aged man accompanied him. The older man was still handsome despite his bulk and the more or less evident ravishes of fast living on his face. He pulled over a chair and sat down.

"You"—he indicated Butch—"have a chair. You'll be here awhile, and there's no sense to your getting all tired out."

Butch sat down and the chair groaned under his weight. Two of the sleek hoods moved close and kept their guns ready. The portly man offered Carol a cigarette and lit it for her. Butch refused one.

"Now let's understand one another," this man said with remarkable smoothness and persuasive powers. "At the moment both of you happen to be—well—prisoners. We could do almost anything to you, but that isn't our way unless we are forced into it. Suppose you tell me who you are, how you contacted us, and who sent you."

CAROL

"You got the wrong guy, mister," Butch answered. "I went into this dump to dance, but it seems like nobody likes me because I'm too big. So I went out to get some fresh air and I was going to the roof. I like high places."

The portly man laughed. "Not a bad excuse, but under the circumstances highly improbable. A short time ago you attacked a

friend of ours, made him tell you about this place and you came right down. This friend got loose and phoned us to expect you. There's no use lying. And you, young lady"—he looked at Carol—"you're a proficient liar too, but it won't work. We checked with the newspaper you indicated sent you to interview Banton about his son's death. They've never heard of you. Now let's tell the truth for a change."

"All right," Carol said. "I'd like to. You start—by telling me what this is all about. I admit you don't live up to my expectations as a gang leader, not the kind to boss around four greasy bandits like those guarding us now."

THE portly man laughed again—pleasantly, too.

"These men? Bah—they're punks. Useful in their own way, I suppose, but short on brains. You called me their leader. I'm sorry, but that's wrong. I also see that you need persuasion—so I'll let you attend a meeting, You'll see what you are really up against and then I hope you will cooperate, because if you don't, I'm sorry to say I shall be compelled to turn you over to this quartette. Take a look at them, Don't you see how they'd enjoy the proceedings?"

Carol looked and shivered. Butch bristled, but he didn't try anything. Those two guns against the back of his neck were much too persuasive.

At a gesture from the portly man, they arose and followed him down a hall and into a big room. About sixteen or eighteen men were seated near the walls. At the further end of the room was a closed door, a desk beside it, and a swivel chair behind the desk. It looked much like a small meeting hall of some business place where employees could be summoned for pep talks.

Carol eyed the men, wondering about them somewhat, because they were conservatively dressed and looked as though they had a far higher degree of intelligence than the average crook.

She and Butch were led to the left wall where there was plenty of room. Their custodian stood beside them, and spoke in a low voice.

"You'll see what you are up against in a minute. You'll be questioned, too, and let me warn you, the man who leads us isn't quite as merciful as I may seem to be. If you refuse to answer him, he may order your immediate deaths. Take my advice—talk."

Then things happened. First of all a pale green lamp bulb above the closed room, glowed. Instantly silence fell over the assembled group. The door opened, remained that way a few seconds, then closed again although no one came through it.

Carol gasped and pressed a hand against her throat. She knew what all this portended. There was an invisible man—a crook leader with abnormal powers!

CHAPTER VII
Butch's Trail

A FEW angry glances shot Carol's way. Then the silence was broken by the sound of steps. Someone who walked with a limp—*clump, thud-clump, thud.*

The swivel chair behind the desk moved. Then it creaked as if someone sat down in it. There was a decanter of water and a glass on the desk. The decanter was lifted by an invisible hand, water was poured into the glass and this was raised.

The water disappeared, and certainly none of it landed on the desk or the floor. The glass was banged down. A voice that came out of nowhere, spoke. It was calm, unruffled, and well-modulated. The voice of an educated man.

"Hello. We're all here, I see—even to a pair of unwelcome guests. I shall attend to them in a moment. Let me tell all of you that things are progressing smoothly—profitably too, as you all probably know. What we have accomplished this far is a mere drop in the bucket. I... Just a moment. Loopey, come forward."

A thin-faced, round-shouldered man shuffled toward the desk, then stopped at a word of command. His left eye was swollen and discolored.

"Loopey," the voice said, "what happened to your eye? Have you disobeyed my orders that none of you were to get into any trouble?"

"Well, you see"—"Loopey" tried to grin, but it was a dismal failure—"I got a lot of enemies. I figured nobody knew me in this town, so I just walked around. Little while ago a guy I trimmed in Des Moines spotted me. He just walked up and punched me in the face. Before he could call a cop, I scrammed."

"Holy smokes!" Butch said in a hoarse voice. "I can't see the guy behind that desk, but he can see us. He saw that mouse all right."

"Silence!" the invisible man snapped. "You'll have a chance to talk. All right, Loopey. You'd better keep under cover until this gentleman from Des Moines leaves town."

"Don't worry,"—Loopey smiled crookedly—"he won't see me again, but I've been thinking. You know—if we could get in on your secret. So nobody can see us even if we stand right beside them. Well then, that would—"

Low, derisive laughter came from the desk, and the swivel chair moved and creaked as if the invisible man were shaking with mirth.

"Loopey, that's one thing no one else will ever know. My secret will die with me... Now to business. Tomorrow we pull the biggest job thus far. It

will net us a cool million, with discounts for fencing the stuff properly. That may become difficult because our loot is well known and will have to be re-cut. However, we go through with it anyhow. Arrangements are complete. Those of you involved know your orders. If there are no questions, you may be dismissed. File out singly, and don't stand around in the dance hall."

The men left the room. Then the swivel chair moved again so that its unseen occupant appeared to be looking at Carol and Butch.

"Well," the voice said, "we now come to our prisoners. Hmm—I shouldn't like to have such a pretty girl abused, and if I turn my boys loose on the big fellow, they're liable to wear themselves out. Suppose we just confide in one another, eh? Tell me who you are and who sent you. You have my word that if you answer truthfully, no harm will come to you."

"What if we don't?" Carol asked bluntly.

"Then"—the voice became harsh—"I'll have to dispose of you and not in a pleasant manner, either. You have your choice, and the decision must be immediate."

BUTCH left the talking to Carol. She was a faster thinker than he was, and she must know that the Black Bat would be on the trail by now.

"You're the funniest crook I ever met," Carol said, "and I'm not talking about your invisibility either. You sound like a school teacher, or perhaps a lawyer trying to sway a jury. But it's no soap, my friend. Your men made a mistake when they kidnapped me. I don't know about this—this gorilla who looks like a man, but I'll admit I don't mind having him on my side."

Ever since Butch had been searched in the other room he had clutched his handkerchief in one hand. Now he idly thrust it into his pocket. The invisible man must have noticed this.

"What did you put in your pocket? Fancy—search him! He's hiding something."

The portly man whose name seemed to be "Fancy," dug a hand into Butch's pocket, drew out the handkerchief—and the aspirin bottle. He opened the screw top and sniffed. Then he handed back the handkerchief and walked up to the desk.

"I don't know what it is, sir. I never did hear of liquid aspirin."

"Put it down," the voice commanded. "Leave the top off. I want to smell it."

The bottle stood on the middle of the desk. There was silence for a moment or two. Then the voice said:

"I think I know what this is. It's the bottle of medicine we sent for in a certain place. Been worrying me—the failure to find it, that is. Now I'm sure this giant who is our prisoner knows much more than he pretends. I gave both of you a chance to speak. I'll give you one more."

"If you're referring to me," Carol answered blandly, "you can go to the devil."

"Yeah, that goes for me too," Butch grunted.

He was surveying the room cautiously and realized that except for this portly man, they were alone. Butch crammed the handkerchief into his pocket and with a sudden bellow of rage long suppressed, he gave the portly man a shove and dashed straight toward the desk.

He pushed the desk aside with a mighty thrust, looped a bone-crushing punch with his left hand, and centered it somewhere just above the swivel chair. Butch was almost thrown by the force of his own punch for it just whipped through thin air.

Then the four oily-haired gangsters rushed in and hurled themselves on him. Butch lifted one and threw him across the room. He grabbed for another and the remaining two simultaneously crashed their gun butts against his skull. Butch dropped with a thud that shook the floor.

The voice of the invisible man came again, angry and bitter in tone.

"Very well. We can't let them go. It makes little difference who sent them so long as they do not get free to report. Lock them up until later, when the section becomes quiet. Then dispose of them. I'll leave that up to Slim—how to get rid of them."

One of the sleek-haired thugs nodded, and patted a swelling jaw.

"Don't worry. Boss. I'll take care of 'em all right—especially Tarzan. He just biffed his last guy...."

IN a rather ancient-looking coupé which possessed a great deal more power under its battered hood than many sleeker cars, were two men. Silk Kirby drove and the man at his side wore black clothing, even to the shirt. A black, broad-brimmed hat was pulled well down and a pair of dark glasses obscured his eyes.

Tony Quinn could not pass through traffic, even in a car, wearing the hood and cloak of the Black Bat, so he disguised himself as best he could. Those scars around his eyes were a dead giveaway and then, too, practically every policeman in the city knew him by sight.

Silk was nervous and impatient. Tony Quinn laid a hand on his arm.

"Take it easy, Silk. Wouldn't do for us to be stopped. I admit speed is essential, but too much is worse than too little. Carol and Butch have undoubtedly run into some trouble. They'll hold out for a time, though. Both are pretty good at bluffing and stalling. We'll pick up their trail at Roy Banton's home. Park the car on the street parallel with the house. I'll slip through yards and reach it

from the rear. We've got to be careful."

Ten minutes later, the Black Bat, clad in cloak and hood, passed through the darkness and was almost as invisible as this astounding crook whom he now battled. The Bat possessed another advantage, too. Things ordinarily hidden to other men were in plain sight to him. Darkness concealed nothing. He stepped over impediments that might have given him a noisy spill.

The elder Banton was alone in the house, nursing his battered face, and thinking of his dead son. He heard no sound and was only aware of a visitor when a hand touched his shoulder. He jumped out of his chair with a shrill cry that was cut off when he saw the intruder. Saw the somber clothing, the slate-gray eyes that peered from behind a black hood, and the cloak eddying out like the wings of a great bird.

"Wh-who are you? Wh-what do you want?"

"Please sit down again," the Bat said. "I'm really not as bad as I look—to those who have no reason to be afraid of me, anyway. I'm the Black Bat. Your son died this morning, and I am not satisfied with the manner of his death. I think he was murdered."

"So do I—so do I!" Banton cried eagerly. "Roy wouldn't kill himself, no matter what happened. He was in a little trouble before and he never became discouraged. Please help me prove he wasn't mixed up in that bank robbery."

"I will. Now tell me who visited you today. I think there was a girl—"

"I didn't see a girl," Banton said, and then explained what had happened. "I thought I'd smother to death when Captain McGrath released me."

"Captain McGrath?" the Bat cried. "Are you sure?"

"Well, he said he was. He called a number to check on the ownership of some car and they gave him the information right away. Big man—biggest I've seen in a long time. I should think he'd scare crooks to death."

Banton did not hear the Bat's sigh of relief. Butch was posing as McGrath.

"Tell me," the Bat queried, "why McGrath wanted to locate the owner of a car? Did you hear what he asked for—the numbers, I mean?"

BANTON trusted this man. He had heard of the Black Bat often, but never had given him much thought beyond believing he was just a sensation seeker. Now he knew differently. He knew that the Black Bat honestly sought to aid people oppressed by crime, and run down the criminals.

"Captain McGrath phoned me later on," he admitted. "Said someone might come to see me, and that I was to give certain information."

"Tell me. Quickly, please! It may mean McGrath's life. I'm the man he was expecting to call on you."

"Well, he said he'd checked the car, and that the owner was somebody named Hartwell Proctor over on Broadview Terrace. Then he mentioned something about a club. I—can't seem to remember the name of it. Could it be the Eland Club?"

The Bat groaned. Butch had left his trail all right, as he had always been ordered to do, but Banton had forgotten. The Black Bat knew all night-clubs and there was none by that name.

All he had was Hartwell Proctor's name and the Bat wondered just what good it would do him.

He knew Proctor. The man was an attorney, prominent and successful with an extensive criminal practice and a reputation for never having lost a client to the electric chair. That reputation was a bit one-sided, because Proctor never took a murder case unless it looked like a sure thing.

"Think!" the Bat implored. "Think hard. Perhaps the name was something like the Eland Club."

Banton shook his head slowly. "I—can't think. So many things happened today. That man came and hit me, terribly hard. He searched the house and the bathroom. Captain McGrath did, too, and he found something. An aspirin bottle with some of Roy's sedative liquid in it. Roy broke the bottle and had to use the aspirin—"

The Bat moved quietly away as Banton spoke. This old man had suffered much and there was a logical excuse for Butch's information to slip his mind. It put beads of sweat on the Black Bat's forehead because now he would be delayed, and delay was the one thing he could not afford.

Banton looked up and started to speak. He was alone in the house.

CHAPTER VIII
Photostatic Copies

SILK drove like a maniac toward Broadview Terrace.

Along a quiet street, the Black Bat peeled off his robe, hood and even his shirt. Before they had covered a dozen blocks, all the black clothing had been removed, and beneath them he wore lighter garments, of a type usually affected by Tony Quinn. He took a cane from a rear compartment in the car—well hidden, too—and placed the Bat's regalia into the concealed place.

"I know Proctor," he told Silk. "I'm going in as Tony Quinn. Park the car a little away from the front of his house so he can't see it. While I keep him busy, have a look in the garage. There might be something in the way of a clue, especially if that

car Butch was checking on is there. Be careful. We don't know exactly what we're up against."

Tony Quinn got out of the coupé. His eyes were staring straight ahead, his chin raised in the pose affected by men who cannot see and therefore do not have to keep turning their heads. His cane tapped away as he walked toward Proctor's home.

He made a little noise climbing the porch steps and a servant opened the door before he could fumble for the bell button.

"Is Mr. Proctor in?" Quinn asked. "I'd like to see him. No—not a client. A friend."

The servant stepped aside and waved his hand for Quinn to enter. Then he squinted at the caller and his austere expression faded to one of pity. He helped Quinn over the threshold and led him down the hall to where Proctor sat in his library.

Proctor was a well-proportioned man, always immaculately dressed, and rarely without a flower in his lapel. Now he wore a dressing gown, and he gave a cheery greeting as he helped Quinn into a chair.

"Tony Quinn, of all people! I'm delighted to see you. We had some pretty lively battles in court in the good old days, didn't we?"

Proctor sat down behind his desk, suddenly picked up a couple of big law tomes and hastily placed them on top of several papers. Quinn's eyes never even moved in the direction of the desk, but he saw what those papers were. Photostats!

"This isn't just a personal visit," Quinn said, "although I'm enjoying the sound of your voice again. Proctor, you were the one man I always hated to get up against. You didn't bother much with evidence or cross examination—just used that seductive voice of yours on the jury. Did you know I'm going back into practice? Yes, it's true. I've molted long enough. Judge Leslie's son, young Bob, is in a jam. Under arrest in fact, so I thought I'd do what I could. Now it's quite impossible for me to consult law books—they haven't been printed in Braille yet. I wonder if you'd be willing to help me. I'm especially interested in the law on an attorney's responsibility for his client's confidential interviews and documents placed in an attorney's custody for safe-keeping."

Proctor stared straight down at his desk top and Tony Quinn saw both his hands bunch into fists until the knuckles were white under great pressure.

"What? I—yes, yes, of course," Proctor came out of his coma. "Certainly, Tony. I'd consider it a privilege. Want to wait?"

"No. It might take awhile. I'll run along and phone you tomorrow. Bob Leslie is being brought into magistrate's court. He'll be bound over for General Sessions, of course, and there will be time enough. Thanks for your help. I hate to impose on anyone, but without my sight—"

"Nonsense," Proctor arose. "I'll do all possible."

MEANWHILE Silk had not been idle. When he slipped into the garage, he heard a racket upstairs and then a loud thump, as if someone had fallen out of bed. Before Silk could reach the chauffeur's quarters, the man came down. Twisted pieces of bed sheets were still tied to one wrist and the chauffeur was in a vast hurry.

He stepped up to the phone on the garage wall and asked for outside, got it, and rapidly dialed a number. Silk. not more than three feet to the rear and well hidden, made a mental note of the number called. The chauffeur's hands seemed partially numbed from being tied up, and he was so slow with the dialing that Silk's job was made easy.

"Hello," the chauffeur finally said. "This is Gombell. Let me speak to Fancy—quick. It's important!"

The name, Fancy, made Silk jump in amazement. Then he shrugged. There were several slick confidence men bearing that name, usually with an additional moniker like Fancy Dan or Fancy Jack. This might be just a coincidence. Gombell had to wait a moment, then he spoke with the eagerness of a man in grave danger unless he got his point over.

"Gombell calling. Listen—a big guy, a regular giant, batted me around and tied me up. Found out about the Elite Club. No, I didn't tell him. He saw the dame's picture and it had the name of the club on the back. He also saw a pack of matches advertising the club. He's on his way over. Ought to be there right now. You'd better get at least five or six guys to take him because that baby can scrap and he's big as two ordinary people... No, I don't know who he is or what he knows, but he spells trouble and lots of it."

The chauffeur hung up. Silk, gripping a heavy wrench, stepped close and swung it with unerring precision. It was not a time to temper his acts with mercy. Silk knew where Butch was, and Carol, too, probably.

Silk couldn't take a chance on fighting Gombell. Too much was at stake. He grimly tied the man up again using wire this time. An efficient gag was inserted between the fellow's teeth, then Silk contacted information and got the address of the number Gombell had called. He slung the unconscious chauffeur over one shoulder and staggered out into the night with his heavy burden.

By skirting the dark edges of the drive he reached the street without creating an alarm. Making sure he was still unobserved, Silk carried his victim to the coupé, opened the baggage compartment, and stuffed him inside. He locked the lid into place, dusted his hands, then worried as to when Tony Quinn would emerge.

Quinn came out about ten minutes later and shuffled along the sidewalk to the car. When he got in, Silk told him what had happened.

"The Elite Club, eh? Good! It does sound something like the Eland. Old Banton can be excused for balling it up. Let's get started, Silk. We'll take care of the driver later."

"I've done that already," Silk said grimly. "He's in the baggage compartment. I figured he might prove useful. I wonder what kind of a dump this Elite Club is."

"By the address it must be honky-tonk," Quinn said while he replaced the light-weight black clothing of the Black Bat.

Silk swung the heavy wrench with unerring precision.

He donned the cape, but left the hood off until they reached their destination. Silk pulled up almost a block away. The Bat looked at the building intently.

"A TAXI dance hall. Perfect foreground for a gang meeting. Nobody would question it if any number of men came and went. A good front all right, and it indicates a gang involved. Which doesn't speak too highly for our invisible menace. A man who can make himself disappear shouldn't need help.

"Now—there's a fire-escape at the rear, Almost an open invitation for anyone who might try to enter by the back way, so we'll vote against it. The roof can't be reached from neighboring buildings—so we have left the cellar, or the first floor delivery entrance. Drive me up to that alley, and then play the invisible man, Silk. I don't want you seen around here."

Silk drove closer to the place and suddenly he jammed on the brakes, pulled over and quickly yanked down the brim of his hat.

"The most amazing thing!" he said. "See those men coming out? I know most of them. They're high class confidence men. There's Loopey—he rounds up the suckers. There's Little Jeff—boy, is he a smooth article! And Chappie, who can make dice talk and aces stand up and bark when he snaps his fingers. Those others—they run shill games and the 'Big Store,' high class stuff where they trim suckers for upwards of fifty grand at a clip. What in the world is it—a convention?"

"It is odd." The Black Bat studied the men who were leaving the place. "From what you've told me, Silk, confidence men rarely band together in large groups. They work alone, or in pairs. A crowd spoils their game. Isn't that true?"

"Very much so, sir. I can't figure it out at all. Unless they're running a 'Big Store' upstairs. I'm talking about a real set-up. They build real stock brokers' offices or race betting rooms right down to the last detail, and run them with phony suckers playing the gaff. It gives the real suckers—'marks,' we call 'em—a feeling they're in good company. But I never heard of running a 'Big Store' in a taxi dance hall."

"They're not," the Bat said. He pulled on his hood. "I'll get out here. The street seems empty and I can make the alley without being spotted. You make yourself scarce. Wish me luck, Silk."

The Black Bat slipped out of the car, reached the shadows of the buildings and seemed to blend with them. Then, as Silk backed up, he saw the blur at the mouth of the alley, and that was all. The Bat ran noiselessly down the littered passway, paused at the fire-escape and went up a few steps.

Without the aid of a flash or any other kind of light, he studied the marks made by Butch's shoes and by the two hoodlums who had pursued him. The Bat's eyes penetrated the darkness as if it had not existed.

CHAPTER IX
Without Mechanical Contrivances

JUST as he rounded a corner, the Black Bat saw a man squatted on the doorstep of the delivery entrance. He had an automatic in his lap. Ordinary eyes would never have seen this weapon, but the Bat's sight was by no means ordinary. Since Butch had made his attempt to enter, a guard had been set out.

The Bat saw a refuse bin far at the rear. Without making a sound, he made his way to it, quietly raised the lid and drew a pack of matches from his pocket. Reaching far down into the bin so the tiny blaze would not be noticed, he struck a match and applied fire to the discarded papers and boxes in the bin. Closing the lid quickly, he beat a retreat back to a spot near the building.

In about three minutes, smoke began pouring out of the bin. The guard saw it, growled something and went to investigate, taking his gun with him. He glanced back at the building suspiciously, but saw nothing.

The Black Bat waited until the guard raised the lid, and thick smoke obscured his vision, then the Bat lightly ran to the rear door. It was not locked. The presence of the guard evidently had been presumed enough of a barrier against intruders.

He found himself in an empty back room, but steps led to the floors above, and he went up these quickly. Then he heard a shout of rage and Butch's blatant voice yelling defiance. The Bat whipped out two guns, slowed up somewhat, and crept along the corridor.

Butch yelled again and this time there was a tinge of fear in the sound. Not for himself, the Bat knew, but probably for Carol. He speeded up his advance until he reached a lighted room.

Inside were the four greasy hoodlums, and Carol and Butch. The prisoners were strapped in chairs and one of the sneering thugs was busy exhibiting a short piece of rope with a six inch chunk of wood braided around the rope.

It was a garrote, and to use it was one of the cruelest ways in the world to kill a man. Carol, wide-eyed and helpless, kept trying to avert her eyes from the grim murder machine, but her captors constantly dangled it in front of her eyes.

"When I get loose," Butch thundered, "I'll take you buzzards apart! That's a promise."

Yeah?" one of them scoffed. "Listen, you gorilla, when you get loose it'll be the guys from the morgue doing the job. Well—let's get it over with."

He advanced on Carol and she shrank back as far as her bonds would permit. The crook grinned in high glee. Then the smile suddenly faded from his face, and was replaced with a look of the most vivid terror. His lips were drawn back, his nostrils quivered and his eyes bulged. He began to shake. The garrote fell to the floor.

His three companions were already standing with their hands as high in the air as they could reach. In the doorway stood a menacing figure, a man with a black hood over his head and a cape that looked like the wings of a bat outspread. Two automatics were in his hands.

"Cut your prisoners loose!" The Bat's voice sounded like a death knell to the hoodlums. "Just one of you do it, and be careful. You others stand as you are."

One of the men drew a knife so slowly that it looked like a slow motion picture. He didn't want to lend any illusion about his whipping a gun out of his pocket. He opened a long, thin blade and walked behind Carol's chair. Suddenly, the point of his knife was pressed against Carol's throat.

"DROP them guns," he yelled. "Drop 'em or I'll sink this knife right through the dame's throat."

The Black Bat's guns never seemed to move.

"You're asking for the quick finish you deserve," he warned.

"I'll kill her!" the thug screamed. "I'll do it, I tell you! She'll die if you don't give up!"

One gun roared and bucked. The thug, intent on trying to drive the knife home, suddenly found himself gripped in a ghastly paralysis. Probably he didn't know that, because death comes quickly when a heavy slug crashes through the skull. Anyway the knife fell out of his hand without making more than a scratch on Carol's throat.

The Bat's second gun covered the other three prisoners who were reduced to quaking shells. Their own pal had been standing directly behind the girl, and even stooped a bit so that only the very top of his head showed above the girl. And the Bat's one shot had crashed into the portion of exposed temple, whizzing not more than half an inch above the girl's blonde hair.

"Would one of you other gentlemen like to substitute for your friend?" the Bat asked. "Without fireworks, if you please. I don't enjoy killing people—even rats like you. Pick up the knife and cut that girl free."

One of the men half reeled across the room. There were no shenanigans about his movements either. In a moment Carol got up, blinked a few times, then sat down again.

Butch jumped out of his chair the moment the last rope was severed. He grabbed the man who cut it, yanked the knife out of his hand, and hit him on the chin. Then he hitched up his pants a notch, favored the Black Bat with a broad, significant grin, and suddenly charged at the two remaining thugs.

Butch O'Leary was a primitive soul when it came to fighting. There was no sadism in his make-up—just the urge to put his enemies out of the way as promptly as possible. He did this by grabbing each man around the neck, lifting them like rag dolls and bumping their heads together. He let them drop to the floor, stared down for a moment, then shrugged.

"I been wondering if those guys would leak oil when I banged them together. Boy, they sure got enough of it on their scalps. Say, Boss, we really found a few things here. There is an invisible man!"

"Yes." Carol found herself. strong enough to stand now. She clung to the Bat's arm. "I know how ridiculous it sounds, but we saw it—with our own eyes. There's a meeting room down the hall. The invisible man opened the door, closed it, walked across the floor—or rather, he limped, because his footsteps sounded like those of a lame person—and then he sat down back of the desk. He even poured a glass of water and drank it, though heaven knows where that water went when the glass was tipped right there in the air."

"We'll take a look at that room," the Black Bat promised. "Right now because that shot may have been heard."

"Not on your life it wasn't," Butch put in. "That orchestra out front is punk enough to drown out a seventy-five—a whole battery of 'em, I'll bet. I'll show you where the room is. There ain't anybody else around. The big shots beat it. One of 'em said he was sorry for us, and couldn't stand seeing us knocked off. Real nice guy he was. I think I'll just bust his jaw, and not his neck."

THE Bat went over to the dead man, knelt and searched him. He found nothing of significance. From a small pocket he took one of his black stickers and affixed it to the dead man's forehead. The Black Bat branded always his own handiwork so that no other person would be blamed.

An examination of the other three men gave him no information either and they were out cold; would be for many minutes.

The Bat then followed Butch into the meeting room. Carol stayed by his side.

"I knew you'd come, darling," she whispered. "But it wasn't any too soon. Those sleeky men are bad all through—especially the one you shot. I can't even feel sorry for him. A garrote—ugh!"

She shivered and the Bat passed an arm about her waist.

They entered the meeting hall. The Black Bat

went to work at once. First of all he examined the desk closely, looking for mechanical contrivances to explain the phenomena which Carol and Butch had witnessed. There were none. He examined the door, without result, then looked over a small back room. There was nothing to indicate that the invisible man might have been a fraud.

"I still don't believe in invisibility," he announced, "but I've got to admit that whoever handled this business is no slouch at it.... We'd better get out of here now. Silk is hanging around somewhere and he's got a prisoner stuffed in the back of the coupé. Your own car must be around somewhere too, Butch. Will you take Carol to the lab?"

"What about them three lugs?" Butch asked.

"I'll phone Captain McGrath and make him a present of them," the Bat said. "Get going. Oh, wait! There's a guard probably sitting on the little platform in front of the door. Think you can take care of him. Butch? He's armed."

Butch showed considerable enthusiasm.

"Swell! When they carry rods, I can sock 'em harder. Tell McGrath he'll find a rat in the ash bin."

Three minutes later, the Black Bat heard the lid of the refuse bin slam shut. Butch had taken care of his man.

The Bat returned to that meeting hall and spent several more minutes examining it again. He didn't want to express his real feeling in front of Carol and Butch, but the utter lack of any mechanical devices stunned him.

Was there such a thing as an invisible man? A drug or a ray which could dissolve someone into a state where the human eye couldn't detect his presence? The Bat knew of many recent advances in science. some of them astounding, but this—in the hands of a criminal!

It meant a highly dangerous game to play if he hoped to land this super-crook.

Silk was waiting outside, and at the Black Bat's suggestion he stopped the car and went into a drugstore to notify Captain McGrath where to find four prisoners and a dead man. Then Silk drove directly to the vicinity of Tony Quinn's home.

"What'll we do with his nibs in back?" Silk asked.

The Bat frowned. "Make sure he's still unconscious and put a blindfold around his eyes. Better stuff his ears, too. We'll take him into the lab. It's the only convenient place, and he'll never know where he's been. Probably, he'll talk when he sees my equipment. He'll think it something new in the line of torture devices. Can you handle him alone, Silk?"

"Yes, sir. I'll have him in the lab in ten minutes. Here we are... I'll park until I drag our man into the estate. See you later."

CHAPTER X
The Bat's Dilemma

THE Black Bat, still in his regalia, as a concession to the only prisoner ever brought into the privacy of the laboratory hidden in Tony Quinn's home, paced the floor.

"I'm not sure just what we're up against," he said seriously. "I refuse to believe there is such a thing as an invisible man until it's absolutely proved, but meanwhile we've got to be most careful. For our own protection we must assume that such a crook does exist. We must realize that he can go anywhere, do almost anything.

"He could have stood by while we knocked out his men, examined his meeting hall. He might have stolen a ride on the coupé or with Butch. That means he could possibly be right in this room with us, listening to every word I'm saying. It's just presumption, mind you, but anything seems possible in this case. How is your prisoner. Silk?"

"Groaning a little, sir. He's coming out of it and he's not badly hurt either. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

"Good," the Bat approved. "We'll make him talk, if possible.... Now let's review this business. There have been two robberies, both apparently done by a crook cloaked with invisibility. Everything points to that fact. However, the two men, employed by the victims of the robberies, who were closest to the crime are also dead.

"I've learned that McGrath is beginning to believe in the impossible. Seems the clerk at a jewelry store was shot, and not with the gun he carried. The room in which the murder took place was sealed, but someone stated that he felt a breeze such as an invisible being might make passing close by when McGrath blasted the door open. I saw Roy Banton's father. Carol, just what happened there?"

Carol winced. "I walked right into a trap. The man I mistook for Mr. Banton was one of the crooks. He threw a drape on me and carried me out. I didn't learn a thing except that this man had some blood on his trouser cuff."

"From Banton," the Black Bat said. "He beat the old man up unmercifully. Seems he wanted to find something of great importance. Something that must have been in the medicine cabinet."

"I know all about that," Butch broke in. "I searched the cabinet, too. This guy who fell off the roof, couldn't sleep good so he had a doctor give him a sedative. He kept it in a bottle, but a couple of nights ago he busted the neck off the bottle. So he emptied aspirin tablets out of another bottle and poured the medicine in instead."

"And you have the bottle?"

"Oh, Butch," Carol cried. "That was what they took away from you, wasn't it? The invisible man sounded relieved when it was found on you."

"Yeah"—Butch grinned happily—"only I used my noggin this time. I guessed whatever was in that bottle meant trouble for the mob, so I unscrewed the top and let a mess of the stuff run out into my handkerchief. It's still soaking wet—and here it is!"

He proudly produced the handkerchief, stained a light pink by the drugs.

"Nice going," the Bat complimented. "There's enough soaked up to analyze. Now let's see to our prisoner."

Silk stepped over to the man.

"I think he's playing 'possum, sir. He moved a few minutes ago—let his head drop down into his arms, see? He stopped groaning, too. Shall I take off the blindfold and remove the plugs from his ears?"

"Yes, but first Butch and Carol ought to leave. Go into the anteroom, you two. Silk, you remain behind the man so he can't see you. All right—wake him up."

SILK removed the blindfold, ear plugs, and even the gag. He raised the chauffeur's head and slapped him gently on the cheek.

"Come on—wake up," he said. "Open your eyes. Wake up, do you hear me?"

"Wait, Silk," the Black Bat gasped. "Silk—his eyes are open! They're glazed. This man is dead!"

"Dead?" Silk shouted stridently. "But I didn't slug him hard. I didn't even break the scalp open. How could he be dead? He was all right a couple of minutes ago."

The Black Bat ripped open the chauffeur's shirt and felt for a heartbeat. He got a stethoscope from his lab equipment and used that. Then he stood up.

"Nevertheless this man is dead," he said. "Help me carry him to the table. I'm going over the corpse inch by inch. And Silk, bolt that trapdoor!"

Silk looked startled. "You don't mean you think the invisible man—"

"I don't know what to think," the Bat said. "All I know is that we're in an awkward position. This man was alive five minutes ago. Now he's dead."

They placed the body on a table beneath a huge and powerful series of lamps. The Black Bat sniffed at the dead man's lips and shook his head.

"I thought he might have taken poison, but he was gagged. There are no wounds on his body, and he died so quickly and silently that only a violent poison could have done the trick. Watch that trapdoor—and the one leading into the study, too."

The Bat bent over the corpse. His lips, beneath the hood, were drawn into a tight line. The Bat had never given way to a case of nerves, but his hands trembled now.

If he discovered that this chauffeur had been murdered—here in his own lab—then the invisible man must have been present. Must be here even now, although it seemed so utterly impossible. He would know that Tony Quinn and the Black Bat were one and the same. It meant the finish of the Bat and, probably, the death of his three aides.

The Bat reached for a pair of long surgical forceps. Slowly he removed an inch-long needle from the dead man's arm. A strange needle with a number of minute holes along its outer casing. The thing was hollow, like a hypodermic needle. It might have been pushed into the dead man's arm, or even fired from some kind of an air-gun or blowpipe. He held the needle to his nostrils. There was a rancid smell coming from it.

Working furiously, the Bat set up chemical apparatus. He called to Butch, but told Carol to remain where she was.

"Take this corpse," he said, "and put it on a park bench. I hate to do this, but it is necessary. We can't hurt the dead man by going through with it. Wait! Remove his coat first, and cut away the right sleeve of his shirt. Good—put them on the bench. Be careful, Butch. Don't be seen. Go with him, Silk, and then return here at once. Butch, you go back to your room and rest up."

"But, sir," Silk said hesitantly, "suppose there is an invisible man here. When we open the trapdoor, he'll get out."

Butch shivered and looked around apprehensively. The Black Bat shrugged.

"Let him. We can't catch what we can't see. Go ahead with it."

WHEN they vanished down the tunnel, the Bat closed the trapdoor but he didn't lock it. Whipping the hood from his face, he quickly mopped beads of sweat from his forehead. Carol came in and he explained what had happened. It was really best that she know, and be put on her guard.

Tony Quinn began analyzing what still adhered to the strange needle-like murder weapon.

"Don't let it get you down, Carol," he said quietly. "We still have no concrete proof that there is an invisible killer. Yet this chauffeur's death—it's so darned strange. Wait! I was right the first time. Look at the reaction in that beaker. There are only a few poisons that kill so quickly, and this is one of them. It's used on poisoned darts by natives in another part of the world. Part of its contents consists of snake venom."

Carol sat down on the edge of a chair. She kept pulling a handkerchief between her fingers.

"Tony, there's something else neither Butch nor I had time to relate. We listened to that awful meeting and the invisible man addressed his gang.

The Bat removed an inch-long needle from the dead man's arm.

He told them that what's happened so far is nothing. They've got a big job planned for tomorrow during daylight, I think: It involves something worth a million dollars which will have to be sacrificed for less because it must be fenced and broken up, I suppose. Have you any idea what it could be?"

"Not offhand, but I'll try to find out. Nice work, Carol. Those are the things that make you so indispensable to me. You and Butch and Silk... I'm working on the stuff Butch soaked up in his handkerchief now. I've got a hunch about that, too."

He held up a test tube containing the test solution. With a pipette he allowed two drops of a colorless solution to roll gently down the side of the tube. Tilting it, he waited until the two liquids met. Suddenly, the test solution turned white, then faded, as a heavy precipitate sank to the bottom.

"Belladonna," he said slowly. "Roy Banton was supposed to be taking a sedative, but belladonna doesn't fall into that classification. Not by a long shot. Don't ask me why, but I feel a great deal better about this invisible man business. Why should anyone so gifted resort to drugs to make his plans work out?"

"I'm glad," Carol said slowly. "But Tony, you still don't know whether or not someone was in the lab when that chauffeur died. You haven't explained that, have you?"

He wagged his head from side to side.

"No, I haven't. Darn the luck anyway. Just when I take a case into court something like this has to break. I've got to go through with the Bob Leslie affair, no matter what happens. I owe it to his father and then, too, if I back down, they'll wonder why. Especially McGrath. Our trails haven't crossed in this case so far, but they will. Leave that to McGrath. Now home with you, darling. We'll need all our energies tomorrow, and so will the invisible man—I hope."

Silk returned soon after Carol had departed. Tony Quinn stripped off the togs of the Black Bat, picked up his cane and walked into the study through the secret door. His eyes were blank again and he moved stiffly, like a blind man. Silk bustled around getting all the evening papers. He sat down beside Tony Quinn and turned the pages, reading items concerned with auctions and sales.

"THERE must be something," Quinn insisted. "That gang is after a million dollars' worth of loot and they don't mean cash because they indicated the stuff must be fenced. That refers to jewelry. Look at the jewelry auctions." Silk gave an exclamation. "Here it is, sir! Certain Spanish jewels, removed from Spain during the revolution, are offered for sale. Necklaces, rings and... Wait a minute. There's a tiara, of pure gold, and set with some of the most precious gems in the world."

Quinn snapped his fingers. "That's what they're after, Silk. That's it exactly. Now here is our method of operation. You say the sale takes place at four o'clock in the afternoon. Great! That gives me time to go into court for young Leslie. I want you to put on one of your disguises. The one which makes you look like a prosperous banker or broker.

"Go into the auction rooms and watch. If you see any of your former associates—those gentlemen with the slick tongues and smooth fingers—don't let them out of your sight. We'll tip McGrath to expect trouble there. I'll inveigle an invitation to the affair, and a blind man will see all he can, Silk. We may stop this colossal crook right in his tracks. You disposed of the chauffeur's body and called McGrath about it?"

"Yes, sir. McGrath sounded pretty mad, too. He asked me who I was. McGrath never misses on that one. I told him I was Kit Carson and his boys. But, you know, I don't think he believed me. Man, can he cuss!"

CHAPTER XI
Frame-Up

QUINN entered Magistrate's Court leaning on the arm of Jim Charters, law partner of Judge Leslie. Behind them trailed young Bob Leslie, worried and nervous. Quinn sat down, talked to Charters for a few moments and then, when young Leslie's case was called, he arose and addressed the court.

"If Your Honor pleases," he said, "while the jurisdiction of this court does not include felonies such as the defendant is charged with, nevertheless, this court can find the accused not guilty, and I propose to show that there is no evidence of Robert Leslie's guilt."

"If you wish to try the case here," the judge assented. "that is within your rights. We may proceed."

An assistant district attorney placed a witness on the stand, the one who had ejected a blackmailer from his home. He told how he had gone to Bob Leslie, arranged all details with him, and left certain papers which would prove him to be an embezzler.

"I don't know the man who came to demand money," he said. "He wasn't a bad sort—no threats or things of that kind. The only possible way by which he could have learned of my trouble was through Attorney Leslie."

Quinn performed some adroit cross-examining, called no defense witnesses, and merely insisted to the court that there was no proof that young Leslie had been involved in the blackmail. That it was possible his office had been robbed and the documents stolen.

"Nice going, Tony," Charters whispered. "They can't hold him on the strength of evidence presented so far. You'll get an acquittal, sure."

Quinn thought so, too—until there was a sudden interruption. Two men strode down the aisle. The one in the lead was a skinny, unpleasant-looking man, with loose clothing that flapped wildly as he rushed along. He looked more like a scarecrow than a human being, but Tony Quinn knew him. He was George Potter, who liked to call himself a one-man committee for the suppression of crime.

Behind him trailed a bulky, derby-hatted man who occasionally let his coat fall open wide enough to show a nickel-plated private detective's badge. Potter, a wealthy, irascible man, hired Nick Rasely as his investigating force.

Quinn gave no sign that he recognized the coming of trouble. He leaned closer to Charters.

"What is it?" he whispered. "Who is causing the rumpus?"

"Looks like old George Potter's steamed up about something," Charters answered. "That half-wit ought to keep his nose out of trouble. One of these days somebody will snap it clean off. He's got his stooge, Rasely, with him. He's talking to the D.A. now. Oh—oh! You'll hear the dirt in a minute. They're going to swear in that heel, Rasely."

The private detective climbed onto the witness stand, took the oath, then talked like a man quite proud of his work.

"Acting under the advice of Mr. Potter," he said, "I secured a search warrant and went to the home of Judge Leslie, with whom the defendant lives. I searched the place and in a desk, mixed up with a lot of other papers, I found these."

HE held aloft a number of documents. The district attorney asked that he describe the articles and Rasely did.

"These are the papers which young Leslie claims were stolen from his office. They were in his desk at his home, so how could they be stolen, huh?"

"No questions," Quinn reported. He turned toward Charters. "Will you get Potter over here? We've lost this case temporarily, but there's something smelly about the whole affair. Potter carries a stench wherever he goes prying around."

Potter, rubbing his hands and smiling in glee, came over.

"I know what you're going to ask," he said quickly. "Where did I get the hunch those papers would be in Leslie's home? You can ask all you want, Mr. Quinn. I don't have to answer. Enough that I knew they were there, and that it's high time this city learned that even the influence of a judge can't protect a criminal—even if he is his own son. Young Leslie is guilty, and I'll have him sent to prison."

"You have no objection to my having the contents of those papers read to me, or permitting young Leslie to identify them as his own?" Quinn said calmly.

"Not so long as they don't leave my hands," Potter cried. "I know you lawyers. Tricky—full of tricks—but you can't fool me. Charters can look. So could you if you were able to see. A blind lawyer! Just makes trouble for the courts. Should be a law against permitting anyone like you to... Wait, Charters. Don't you dare strike me. I'll have you thrown into jail! I'll have you punished."

"Let him alone, Charters," Quinn said, and the lawyer sat down reluctantly. "Have Bob Leslie identify the papers, then send everybody away. All except Mr. Potter who wants to hold onto the documents so we can't destroy them. You half-witted fool, don't you know those papers are now in evidence?"

Leslie identified them instantly.

"Oh, they're mine all right, but I didn't know they were in my desk at home."

"All right," Quinn said. "You'll be held for higher court. We can't do anything about that. I'll apply for the same bail. Be with you in a couple of minutes."

Charters, who was examining the papers, whistled in surprise.

"Tony, there's dynamite here all right! Plenty of it."

Although Tony Quinn seemed to be looking to the left of those papers and his eyes were blank and lifeless, he was able to glance at a few and he barely restrained a gasp of surprise. The top paper concerned a man named Joseph Gombell, employed by Attorney Proctor.

Gombell, it seemed, had spent a short term in prison for burglary and, in a distant state, there was a charge of manslaughter pending against him under another name. Gombell was the chauffeur who had died in the Black Bat's laboratory only a matter of a few hours before.

Charters kept flipping the papers over, glancing at them idly. Potter clung to one corner of them and his piggish little eyes watched Charters closely. Charters finally thrust them at Potter, turned his back on the man, and talked to Quinn.

"Looks bad for Bob," he said slowly. "He'll have a devil of a time explaining those papers hidden in his home. You told me you spoke to Proctor about the law on this matter. Did he... Well, here he comes right now, and is he excited!"

PROCTOR pulled over a chair.

"Sorry, Tony," he apologized. "I should have been here as I promised, but what a night I've had! My chauffeur was found murdered. Somebody poisoned the poor chap and laid him out on a park bench. I've been trying to help the police find a

motive, but there just doesn't seem to be any. Oddest thing, the murderer had cut away one sleeve of the chauffeur's shirt and also removed his coat.... What about your case? Has it come up yet?"

"Oh yes, and gone right down again on the route to General Sessions," Quinn answered. "Things happened here, too... Well, I'd better arrange the bail. I wonder if one of you would take me home afterward. I sent my man back. Thought I'd be here for quite some time."

Charters offered the use of his car and driver. Quinn asked for the same bail and got it. He took young Leslie aside, sat down in a corner of the gallery, and spoke in a low voice.

"Keep your chin up. We're not licked yet. but we can't afford to lose any time getting at the bottom of this affair. Those papers of yours—the ones found in your desk at home—among them there must be one or two cases involving rather serious crimes. Tell me about these. If the clients involved are being blackmailed, we might be able to work through them, track down the contact men who get the money, and make them lead us to the big boys behind the scheme."

Bob Leslie was not downcast.

"Tony," he said, "you know I'm not involved in this rotten business, and I'll do all I can to help you prove it. That Potter—I almost flirted with a contempt charge when he derided your being blind. I couldn't have a better man than you working for me... About those papers. Probably the worst crime one of my clients described was that of a chap named Joe Gombell. He worked for Proctor, but he didn't dare go to him for advice because he was afraid of losing his job. Seems Gombell was a pretty high stepper in his day. Got mixed up in a fist fight out West and slugged a man so badly that he died. They've been looking for him ever since.

"Three years ago he ran around with a tough mob and was picked up on a burglary charge. He had no record, so he got off with a light sentence, but ever since he's been afraid that his Rogue's Gallery picture might be seen by someone from that Western city. There were no fingerprints involved in the killing case—at least the cops out there didn't seem to bother about getting them—so he was safe on that point."

"And why did he come to you?" Quinn asked.

"Darned if I know," Leslie replied. "Perhaps he felt as though he had to talk to someone—be reassured and made easier in his mind. Of course I told him the best thing to do was surrender, but he didn't see it that way and I don't blame him. With the prison record he accumulated here, they'd be bound to railroad him.

"He gave me all the facts and asked me to investigate—especially the statute of limitations concerning manslaughter in the state where the crime was committed. I never did have a chance to do it. I can't understand how those papers were stolen either. I kept them locked up in a special Atlas vault, one of the most impregnable safety boxes. There were only two keys. One I kept, the other Dad carried around."

"We'll understand everything soon," Quinn said. "We've a few weeks to prepare the case and investigate Potter and his stooge, Private Detective Rasely. I could suggest that if Potter bad to shove his beak into crime, he should begin by investigating his hired help, meaning Rasely of course. He's a crook. I'll see you later on."

CHAPTER XII
Vanishing Tiara

YOUNG Leslie left, and Tony Quinn sat quietly on a gallery chair. His head was high, his blank eyes stared straight ahead. Both hands rested on the knob of his cane and he looked as though he were merely waiting until Charters was ready to take him home.

But Quinn's brain was clicking speedily. Now this case against Leslie was tied up with the invisible man, and Quinn was beginning to see some daylight in the maze of blackmail murder and robbery.

He thought of Attorney Proctor and his visit to him the night before when Proctor had momentarily forgotten that Tony Quinn was supposed to be blind, and had hastily covered certain photostatic sheets on his desk. Was Proctor somehow involved, and could those photostats be made from the documents which now threatened to incriminate young Leslie?

There was another question on his mind, too. How had Rasely and Potter known those documents were hidden in Leslie's home? To demand an answer to that question would only incur suspicion. He decided against it.

Then his trend of thought was rudely shattered, for someone dropped into the seat beside him. It was Captain McGrath, and he didn't look any too pleased with the world.

"I thought I'd find you here," he said gruffly.

Quinn turned his head in McGrath's general direction.

"Why, Captain, what's wrong? You sound as if things aren't going so well. Has anything happened?"

"Has anything happened?" McGrath grumbled. "Oh, no—nothing at all. Nothing except that the Black Bat went on a gun spree last night. Oh, I'll admit the mug he polished off had it coming, and he did turn four badly wanted crooks into my hands. I questioned them until I was blue in the face, but those rats aren't even scared."

"Sorry I can't help you," Quinn said complacently. "Like every other night, I stayed home."

"There's something else, too. Proctor over there—his chauffeur was found murdered. Somebody left him on a park bench and then phoned me. Wise guy, too, but he won't be so wise when I find him. I knew you'd be here so I just dropped by to—well, sort of give you the low-down. I think those killings are the direct result of the invisible man robberies. Now after I left you yesterday, you just didn't happen to bump into the Black Bat, did you?"

Quinn laughed. "Sorry. We're complete strangers even though you try so hard to double us up as the same person. I've got my own worries. Things didn't fare so well with my first case. In fact they've gone downright bad.... Say, would you take me home? Charters promised to but he's tied up."

"Let's go," McGrath took Quinn's arm and piloted him down the row.

"I'm not finished talking yet. Seems that when I explain things to you, the Bat usually gets going a little faster. Oh, go ahead and laugh. Maybe I'm a fool...."

AT three o'clock that same afternoon, Tony Quinn slowly climbed the stairs of the auction rooms where precious jewelry relics of another day were to be sold. His cane signaled his approach and also helped to guide him. People stepped respectfully aside and a few tongues clacked sympathetically.

Tony Quinn was well known throughout the city and his excursions were few. Some wondered what a blind man was doing at an auction. Why should he want to purchase jewelry, when he couldn't even see it?

Outside the place, Butch and Carol were posted at strategic points from where they could watch the entrance and those who came in and out. Silk, disguised as a portly man with gray hair, pince-nez glasses and an important manner, was striding through the corridors of the building, peering intently at portraits and other art exhibits offered for sale.

Silk had developed two disguises during his days as a confidence man. This was one of them. The other made him look like a gawking, country youth, a certain sucker for any kind of a racket. There were crooks who remembered that hayseed, and wondered just how come they had parted with their hard-earned cash to such a dumb fool.

Silk's days as a confidence man were far in the past, but those disguises still came in handy.

Someone took Quinn's arm. It was Captain McGrath again.

"So, where's there's trouble brewing, Tony Quinn shows up," he said softly. "And you try to tell me you're not the Black Bat."

"I'm still telling you, Captain. My being here is the result of a beautifully engraved invitation. And what's this you say about impending trouble? Tell me. If there's going to be a hold-up or something, I'd better get out of here. A blind man is just in the way."

"Say," McGrath grunted, "if what I think will happen really does, everybody here will be just as blind as you are. I got a tip that the invisible man is going to pull another of his stunts. Look—maybe you're right about being in the way. There's liable to be some hot lead flying around. Suppose you drift over there... Oh, I forgot, you can't see. There a little nook on your left and it has a nice, big, substantial-looking statue in front of it. I'll park you there, eh? And keep an eye on you, too."

"That's kind of you, Captain. I'll take advantage of the offer."

Quinn sat down in the nook, but his apparently sightless eyes were able to see everything that went on. The auction was not due to begin for another five or ten minutes.

Quinn worried about the death of Gombell, the chauffeur. It kept etching itself deeper and deeper into his mind. If the invisible man did not possess that power, he certainly built everybody up to believing he did. Even Quinn was inclined toward that belief, too.

If it were true, and the invisible menace had murdered Gombell in the privacy of the Black Bat's lab, there would be fireworks very soon. Exposure of Quinn as the Bat would be sufficient to stop the Bat's activities, and the invisible man must realize this.

Silk wandered by, stopped in front of a large oil painting, and adjusted his glasses. When he spoke, his lips never moved.

"Some of my old friends are present. Saw a couple of others parked outside. Things are going to pop, sure as fate."

HE wandered off again. Then someone banged a mallet on a table and the auction sale was on. A few small pieces were rapidly disposed of and while this occurred, two men rolled in a large glass showcase. Quinn could see the sparkle of precious gems as the case passed beneath the lights. This would be the tiara.

Quinn arose and moved forward a few steps until he could look into the case. He was right. The tiara was placed upon a velvet cushion in the exact center of the case, and that was all it contained.

People pressed around, uttering gasps at the sheer beauty of the thing. A million dollars' worth of gems and gold, loot to attract the best crooks in the world—and the invisible man seemed to top them all in prowess.

Quinn wondered if it was possible that someone, cloaked with the mantle of invisibility, was actually prowling about, waiting for a chance to seize that piece of jewelry. The thought sent shivers up and down Quinn's spinal column.

Other pieces were brought in and displayed by the auctioneer. Bidding started, and the bidders closed in. Two armed guards from a private protective agency stood near the showcase and a middle-aged man remained directly behind it. Quinn never removed his eyes from that case.

The doors of the building were closed and guarded. Gradually the big room became uncomfortable because of the heat emanating from the huge radiators, and from the thickly packed crowd.

Quinn watched McGrath drift around to various parts of the room. The captain saw Quinn, and approached him.

"I don't like to sound like a pessimist," he said, "but I still think that nook is the safest place for you. Flatten yourself against the back of that statue if shooting starts, and it will if the invisible man tries anything. Confidentially, I've sprayed the floor around the showcase with a light film of oil. If anybody steps in it, they'll leave a trail. Do you suppose if a guy was invisible his shoes would make footprints, like anybody else's?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Captain, but it's certainly a worthy idea on your part. Yes, I'll retire to my little nook. Don't worry."

McGrath strolled away. Five minutes crawled by. Then, out of a clear sky, the man behind the showcase gave a yelp of amazement. Quinn stood up automatically and took a chance on moving forward a bit. He could look into the showcase now. The tiara was gone!

McGrath yelled orders. Plainclothesmen who had been merged with the crowd instantly pinned on badges and took up assigned posts. Quinn wetted his lips and wondered what would happen next. His enforced impotence grated on his nerves, but no matter what happened, he would not risk going into action and exposing the fact that he wasn't blind.

Then he wondered if there was something the matter with his eyes. About four yards directly in front of the now empty showcase, footprints appeared on the floor. Footprints made by no visible being! McGrath's men had kept the way to the big doors cleared. McGrath saw those mysterious prints, too, and once he overcame his amazement, he whipped out a gun.

"Down on the floor!" he called out. "Everybody on the west side of the building, drop! I'm going to shoot!"

HE aimed his gun a little ahead of those ghostly footprints and sent a bullet crashing. It hit the marble wall and ricocheted with a zinging sound. He fired again and again. Yet those footprints continued to appear out of nothing.

Quinn looked back. The prints first formed were already fading. He would have given a great deal to be able to examine them closely, but there was no chance even if he had not been forced to pretend he was blind.

Women shrieked, and some fainted. Men stampeded all over the place, obliterating the prints in their frenzy to get away. The man who had been in charge of the tiara was slumped against the case in a forlorn attitude. His eyes were closed as if he had seen all he could bear.

Silk, following orders, forced a path to the side of the showcase and remained there. He tried to spot the confidence men he knew so well, but they were lost in the shuffle of the excited crowd.

McGrath gradually managed to line everyone up. The women were herded into another room to be searched by matrons brought from Headquarters. Every man in the crowd was carefully frisked. It required a full hour to get this over with and the net result was—nothing.

The tiara seemed to have been cloaked with the same mantle of invisibility that hid the robber!

CHAPTER XIII
No Innocent Pawn

McGRATH finally gave orders for the doors to be opened, and the crowd filed out. Quinn, seated behind the big statue, stayed there. He wanted to tell McGrath to dismantle the show-case, to smash it to bits if necessary, on the chance that the tiara might have been slipped into some specially created hiding place.

Quinn thought back over the case. At the conclusion of the robbery at the bank, the person most closely associated with it had died. At the jewelry store, the clerk had been killed. On his new job, the man in charge of that show-case now fell into the same category with the bank clerk and the jewelry store salesman.

Would he die too? And why?

Silk was gone, herded out with the others. Apparently McGrath had given instructions that Tony Quinn was not to be bothered. The captain came over now, face white and eyes harrowed.

"Know what happened?" he asked. "You're lucky you haven't got any eyes. There were footprints, left by that invisible man. I fired right at him—or where I figured he'd be. Those slugs just burned through air. He's got away with it again, Tony. He pulled a job right from under our noses. It's impossible, but it's true.

"Think what this man can do now? Nothing is safe from him, and to make matters worse somebody tipped the newspapers and they've cornered a lot of people who witnessed this thing. The papers are going to be full of it, and they'll catch on that the bank job and the jewelry store robbery were done just like this job."

"Tell me," Quinn said, "did you examine the show-case in which the tiara was displayed? I heard people talking about it. Perhaps the tiara is hidden inside it somewhere. Why not have a look?"

McGrath didn't answer. He just raced back to the showcase. He went around to the back of it, opened the sliding doors, and pulled everything out. He ripped the plush padding away, removed a long mirror used to throw light onto the jewels. He swore softly, then proceeded to dismantle the whole thing.

The custodian of the tiara stood to one side, clearly puzzled by McGrath's antics. Quinn saw him look up suddenly, then tense. He edged away from the scene, got himself in line with the big, wide-open doors and suddenly broke into a run.

Quinn stood up.

"McGrath!" he yelled. "Captain! Someone is running away. I can hear his footsteps. Captain—look out!"

But the fleeing man had too much of a start. Detectives posted near the door had relinquished those positions, and the man had a clear exit. Outside, uniformed police had cleared away the crowd and there was no one to stop the man.

McGrath, aroused by Quinn's shouted warning, yelled orders, but he was too late. The custodian of the tiara went down the outside steps in two great leaps. He streaked across the sidewalk, got halfway across the street, and suddenly screamed in terror. A heavy car, traveling fast, smashed into him and cut off the scream.

The custodian was lifted by the impact and hurled fifty feet. When he fell, his position indicated that he was dead. No man lives with his head practically turned face upward while his stomach is flat against the pavement. The custodian's neck was broken....

ACROSS the street, and hidden behind a glass door of a small building, Butch and Carol saw all this happen. They had been driven to this refuge when police began to clear the area after the robbery.

Carol clutched at Butch's big arm.

"That was murder, Butch!" she exclaimed. "Look! See that coupé parked right in front of this place? It was driven up just before the commotion started, and the cops came. I think the man who was killed was heading for that coupé. Keep your eyes on it. If anyone else gets in, we'll nab him. He may know something."

"Yeah—yeah, I think you're right," Butch answered. "I'm pretty sure I saw the dead guy wave a bunch of keys when he started from the curb. Boy, did he get socked! That car must have been doing forty right here on this busy street. Maybe the cops will catch up with it, you think?"

"No, not with that bus. I heard the motor, and it had power to spare. The driver is set to get clear, too. Probably knows exactly where to turn and how to get rid of the car. Watch the coupé."

During the course of the next fifteen minutes, the excitement gradually died away. A coroner appeared, then a truck from the morgue. Tony Quinn, led by a plainclothesman, came out of the auction rooms and was escorted to a cab. Silk had vanished.

Then, when comparative quiet descended on the section once more, Carol saw a quietly dressed man amble down the street, gawking at the auction rooms and gradually slowing up. He fumbled in his pocket, extracted a key and stopped beside the coupé. It was not locked, and the key must be meant for the ignition switch.

The man got in. Carol gave Butch a significant glance, pushed open the glass door and walked to the street. Butch followed, but he proceeded completely around the back of the coupé. Carol opened her purse, dug into it, and her fingers closed around a small automatic.

She smiled at the man behind the wheel as she climbed into the car. He looked frightened, and started as if to open the door beside him and slip out. Carol's little gun pressed against his ribs.

"I'd stay just there, if I were you." she suggested. "You might try pushing over toward me, too. We're going to have company. Big company."

Butch proved that by crowding into the coupé. He glowered at their prisoner, took the key from the man's shaking hand and started the motor. He pulled away from the curb and headed for a park about half a mile away.

When they reached a quiet spot, Butch stopped, hunched his big body around, and Carol put her gun away. Weapons were no longer needed. Not with Butch handy.

"That fellow is pretty big," she told their prisoner. "He has a peculiar hankering to break people's jaws—especially people he doesn't like and who refuse to become co-operative."

"But—but I don't know what this is all about. I don't know why you brought me here. I just—"

"Shut up," Butch barked. "This coupé was going to be driven away by another man. At least he thought so until he started to cross the street and a murder car bumped him off. Then you come along, to get rid of the coupé in a nice easy way."

"That's a lie! Honest, I don't know what you're talking about. This is my car. I've owned it for years. You've made a mistake, I tell you."

"What's the registration number?" Carol asked. "Any man who has owned a car as long as you say you've had this one must know the plate numbers."

"I—I'm not sure. I—I've got a poor memory."

BUTCH put one mighty hand around the man's throat and squeezed gently.

"Suppose I jog a little memory back into that numbskull of yours? I hope I don't break your neck like happened to the last couple of guys I tried this on."

Their prisoner raised his hands and clawed at Butch's arm. He began to bob his head up and down. Butch let go, but kept his outspread fingers barely touching the man's throat.

"Now," Carol asked sweetly, "are you going to talk? Good! It's about time. Who told you to pick up this car, and why did you do it?"

"I—I don't know the man's name. He told me there was a twenty-dollar bill in it if I—"

Butch pushed the prisoner back and searched him. He had no twenty-dollar bill.

"All right," the man cried. "I lied. I admit it! You two must be cops, and I've been afraid of this for months. My name is Coby. I—I had to obey them. They made me do as they ordered. But I don't know what it's all about. They didn't tell me—just that I was to pick up this car at a certain time. I was to drive it way out in the country, abandon it, and be sure I didn't leave any fingerprints. I don't know who the men were. There were two of them. Real gentlemen they were, until I started to ask questions. Then they threatened to—to—"

"Sounds phony," Butch growled. "Go ahead. I always like fairy tales. being just a little kid myself."

"It's the truth—I swear it!" Coby insisted. and two tears ran down his cheeks. "But I—I can't tell you anything more. I won't! Lock me up if you want to. I refuse to talk about the rest of it, because I'll just get myself into trouble—more than I'm in now. Lock me up! Go ahead. If my lawyer says I can talk, okay. I'll tell everything, no matter what happens to me."

"Who is your lawyer?" Carol asked.

"A man named Proctor. Will you call him for me when we get to the police station? Honest, I don't want to keep quiet, but—well, you wouldn't put yourself in jail either if you were me."

"I think," Butch declared, "that I'll just start working on his right arm. You know—twist it a little. His neck is too tender, and I don't want to kill him—yet."

"No—wait," Carol checked him. "I think this man is telling the truth. He had orders to get rid of the car and be sure there were no fingerprints. Which means the men who sent him on this innocent little errand know that his prints may be on file. Else why demand that he remove them? Look—get some grease from one of the grease cups. I've got paper. We'll just take this gentleman's prints and see how they stack up."

Coby leaned back with a long sigh of desperation. He submitted to the fingerprinting, and Carol managed to get clear prints of his fingertips.

"You can get out here," she told Coby. "Go home and stay there. If any of your friends show up, tell them you ditched the car. and don't say a word about us, do you hear? Breathe a word of it and I'll find out darn quick why your prints are so important for the cops not to get. Start walking."

COBY practically flew over the ground in his haste to get away. Butch was frowning, and he looked something like a great Dane.

"I don't get it," he told Carol.

"It's evident enough, Butch. This car belonged to the man who was run down, murdered. It was parked there for him to make a getaway in, but somebody didn't want him to get far. Then Coby was assigned to drive the car away so that it would seem the dead man was just running without any definite place in mind. They don't want it to seem that his getaway was all set. I don't know why, but it must be important.

"Coby is just what he says he is—an innocent stooge who has no idea what he was doing. Just the same these prints ought to be interesting, Now suppose you drive back to where we left your bus. Tony should hear about this darned quick, and I'm dying to know just what happened in the auction rooms."

Butch started to slide over behind the wheel. Carol's hand moved down toward the seat and picked up a pair of dice and a pack of cards that had been jammed down between the cushion. She stowed these away in her purse.

"Butch," she said, "we thought we were taking Mr. Coby for a ride, but I think he put a fast one over on us. That guy was no innocent pawn. These cards are gambler's stuff—fixed. I can feel tiny indentations on them. And I'll bet you couldn't roll anything but a seven with those dice if you kept it up for ages."

CHAPTER XIV
Blackmail Victim

EXACTLY an hour later, there was a meeting in Tony Quinn's secret laboratory. Silk picked up the marked cards, rolled the crooked dice a couple of times, and then faced Carol.

"Tell me just what this Coby looked like," he said. "How was he dressed? And did tears come into his eyes when he begged off, because he didn't know anything?"

"How did you know that?" Carol asked. "He was a runt of a man. the kind who seems to crawl around instead of walking on his own two legs. He wore a gray suit, a gray hat, and a funny colored handkerchief in the breast pocket of his coat. I'll swear it was pink, or light red anyway."

"I knew it," Silk snapped his fingers. "The Beggar Kid! It's him all over. He used to fake being crippled until he got hep to the big stuff. Then he became one of the best shills in the business. If he got in a jam, he'd cry his way out, and he always carried a pink handkerchief in his pocket. Said it was for luck. Sounds crazy, but you'd be surprised what some of those confidence boys will do."

Tony Quinn, seated in a low leather chair, tapped the arms of it and tried to think.

"Well," he said, "our invisible man pulled another stunt. Now every newspaper in the country will carry sensational stories about it. McGrath wanted to keep the thing hushed up so there'd be no wave of panic. That's out now. The newspaper reporters were tipped purposely. The invisible man has something way up his sleeve, but I think he'll pull another stunt soon.

"He's like a dictator in some respects. He can't stop getting things done or he's finished himself. We know that he is tied up somehow with the theft of certain papers from Leslie's office. We know that part of his gang consists of some of the best confidence men in the country. It all adds up to a question mark."

"What worries me most," Silk said, "is the way that chauffeur was killed in here last night."

"It worries me too, Silk. Now tell me—this Beggar Kid you speak of. Could you find him?"

"In about two hours," Silk vowed. "He hangs around cheap joints trying to promote dice or card games. They draw him like a magnet. He'll be at some small hotel plying his trade. Shall I hunt for him?"

"Yes. Once you have done this, keep on his trail. I expect that the invisible man will call another of his meetings soon, to prepare for the next job. The Beggar Kid will undoubtedly attend, and if we could locate such a spot there's a chance of breaking up the gang. Leave that disguise on Silk, and go hunting."

"Tony,"—Carol sat down beside him—"do you honestly believe there is a person who has discovered how to become invisible?"

"What else can I think? How could two hundred thousand dollars vanish from a bank vault? How could eleven extremely valuable necklaces disappear when they were right on the counter? How could that tiara just disappear like a moonbeam? Where did those mysterious footprints come from?"

"I wish I knew," Carol said thoughtfully. "Butch and I have been able to witness the invisible man really work, It's enough to make your blood run cold. The way that chair moved, those footsteps...."

QUINN arose and placed several fat volumes that had been on his lap, on a table. They were various financial records of prominent people.

"There's one little break in the case," he said. "A dentist named Rowland was in the jewelry store when the robbery took place. He wanted to buy one of those necklaces and, oddly enough, he seemed to select the cheapest one. Was that by accident, or because the invisible man told him to do this so that the rest of the loot would be the most valuable? The article which Rowland examined was priced at sixty thousand dollars. Most young dentists can't afford any luxuries like that, I've checked Rowland in these financial records and his name doesn't appear—so I think Rowland will have a visitor.

"There's one thing I'm rapidly becoming sure of. The invisible man preys on a lot of people who have committed some sin in the past. He's behind the theft of those records from Leslie, and from other lawyers too, I'll wager. It's one strike against him, Why, with his professed powers, should he need help like this? Aid he must force, and always know that those men will turn against him if they get half a chance.

"Carol, you and Butch stay here in case Silk calls back. Watch that no one sees you from the windows of the house if you leave this lab."

Tony Quinn began donning the light-weight black clothing of the Black Bat. He placed two guns into their respective holsters, tucked his cape and hood away, and put on the wide-brimmed hat.

"I'll use your car, Butch," he said. "It's dark enough now so that I'm reasonably safe to prowl. Here's hoping I make Rowland talk."

The Bat drove to Rowland's residence, an old house near the center of the city, His office apparently occupied the front rooms, while he lived at the rear.

The Bat gained admission by picking the back door lock. He crossed through a kitchen, reached the dining room, and stopped there. He could hear someone pacing the floor—up and down, up and down. It was Dr. Rowland, and he didn't look like the suave, smooth article who he had been in Merwin's Jewelry House.

Rowland heard a faint noise, turned swiftly-and froze in his tracks. He took a long breath, held it, and then sat down slowly as he exhaled.

"The Black Bat," he said stonily. "I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry to see you."

The Bat moved forward.

"Your conscience is a terrible bedfellow when you've mistreated it, Doctor. At that, I'm probably better for you than the police. You were sent to that jewelry store. You were told to ask for that tray of necklaces so it would be brought out of the safe and made available for the thief who stole it.

"You couldn't afford to be interested in a sixty-thousand-dollar item. That fact gave you away, although nobody else seems to have figured it out. Suppose you tell me everything. Who approached you? What do they hold over your head? Most of all, what attorney did you consult in the past about this little error in your life?"

ROWLAND rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and at last he spoke.

"You know everything, don't you?" he said resignedly. "And I'm in a special spot, it seems. I don't know whether to defy you, or those rotten influences that pushed me into this thing. However, you do represent the law in a left-handed manner... Yes, I did pull a fancy stunt some years ago. During my last year in college I needed money to finish my course. I set myself up in practice as a regular licensed dentist, when of course I hadn't even taken the exams.

"Nobody found it out, but if they do now—good-by to my career. It worried me so I went to see a lawyer named Proctor. That was a year ago. He told me to sit tight and do nothing. I showed him the phony diploma I hung in my first office. He kept it. Then, a week ago, I had a caller. He produced enough evidence to convince me that Proctor must have sold out to a bunch of blackmailers.

"They told me that if I obeyed them in a small matter, I'd get the originals for keeps. As you said, I was told to visit that jewelry store at a certain minute, and to be precise. All I had to do was get those necklaces out of the safe. I carried out my part, but I haven't seen the evidence they hold over my head as yet. I suppose I never will."

"If I have anything to do about it, you will," the Black Bat promised. "Now about this invisible man business. Of course you know you were working hand in glove with him. You made a statement to the press this afternoon, indicating that you believe there is such a crook, that you actually felt him create a breeze as he passed close to you. Is that the truth?"

"So help me," Rowland said, "it is! I've been trained in the sciences. I know how difficult it is to believe that there is such a thing as invisibility, but you can't deny what your own senses experience. There was a breeze."

The phone on Rowland's desk buzzed and he looked up at the Bat, as if to ask permission to answer it. He received a curt nod, lifted the receiver, then seemed slightly amazed.

"You can believe it or not, Bat, but this is for you," he said.

It was Silk.

"I contacted the others," Silk said over the wire, "and learned you were at Rowland's, so I took a chance and called. It's an emergency. I found the Beggar Kid easily—just by searching out some of the dopes he'd hooked. I found him just where I expected—in a rundown hotel. He left in a big hurry and I tailed him over to a place on the corner of William and Carmody Streets. Looks like a pool room. I didn't go in, but if there's a meeting in progress, it must be darned near over, because the Beggar Kid must have been the last one to go in."

"Very well," the Bat said, and hung up. He glanced at Rowland. "For your own safety, it might be best to keep my visit a strict secret. I'll get those papers back for you if I can. You seem to have done no particular harm. If you are approached, telephone Police Commissioner Warner and give him all the facts. Rely on his integrity. Good night, Doctor—and thanks."

Rowland saw the black-clad man walk backward a few steps.

Then the lights went out and the Black Bat was gone, as smoothly and completely as the invisible crook could vanish....

In a short time Silk saw the Bat's car approach and stop. He got in, breathless and agitated.

"They've just left," Silk informed. "I counted fifteen of 'em, and I knew most of 'em. too. I've never heard of such a meeting of confidence men. The last one came out about two minutes ago."

"Take the car," the Bat said, and pulled down the brim of his hat. "I'm going in anyway. Perhaps his nibs hasn't left yet, or maybe he's just floating down the street right now, laughing at us, because he knows we can't see him. Stick around."

The Bat leaped out of the ear and darted into the doorway of the building which Silk pointed out. There were wide stairs going up, and the building was old and made of wood—a regular firetrap.

CHAPTER XV
Flame Trap

UPSTAIRS the Bat discovered a huge room, given over to a dozen pool tables and all the paraphernalia that goes with an amusement hall of this kind. There were other things, too, among them a cage at the far corner, created out of chicken wire. Enclosed by this were desks and a telegrapher's outfit. A huge blackboard still listed the names of race horses.

The pool-room apparently was the front for a betting syndicate. Newspapers were scattered around, and all of them carried blazing headlines that pushed war news onto the second page. The reporters and copy desk men had gone to town on the invisible crook and his three juicy jobs.

Then the Bat heard someone moving about in a back room. He ducked, made sure his hood and

cape were in place, and drew a gun. Skirting the wall and wishing the single overhead light was out, the Bat came to a narrow door. It was closed, but much more brilliant light came from beneath it.

He heard the sound of papers being moved and someone shoved a chair across the floor. Unexpectedly the light in that small room went out. He twisted the knob, gave the door a kick, and darted inside.

A lance of flame jetted from a further corner. The Black Bat's gun answered, but he knew that he had missed. Vaulting a chair, he slid over the top of the desk and behind it. The would-be killer was protected somehow, unless—and the Bat grew cold at the prospect—he was dealing with the invisible man.

Two more shots sent lead smashing into the side of the desk. The Bat's uncanny eyes penetrated the gloom without much trouble, but there was no one at the point from which these shots had been fired.

He peered around, seeking out every corner of the room. In this survey he became aware that there were no windows in this place, and yet it was a fairly large room in which at least twenty people could assemble in comfort.

Again the gun banged, and plaster dropped down on the Black Bat's bunched shoulders. He answered that shot by firing point-blank at its origin. Derisively the unseen gun cracked again.

Then there was silence for several minutes. The open door sent a small amount of light into the large room, but soon that was gone, too. Not that it mattered to the Bat, but he realized that his position was critical. Whoever have fired those shots, visible or invisible, had managed to reach a switch which turned off the juice.

Waiting, hardly daring to breathe, the Bat wondered what was going to happen next. If he tried to reach the door, he might be blasted into eternity, for the unseen gunner had the range of the whole room. Yet he couldn't remain where he was, just waiting and wondering.

He arose from his hunched position, tensed, and got set to charge toward the door. He delayed that lunge, however, for now his strange eyesight was standing him well. A hand appeared around the corner of the doorway. It lengthened into a forearm. Fingers fumbled along the wall until they found the light switch.

It was located rather high up, so that it was necessary almost to stand on tiptoe to reach it. The Bat reflected that this was an odd place for a light switch. Then the fingers of the unseen man pressed the button.

The Bat's gun roared twice, aiming at the hand and arm. He missed, because things started to happen about that identical instant. First of all, the door slammed shut and the walls shook under its impact. The Bat raced toward it and found there was no inner knob. He rapped the butt of his gun against the panels and they echoed metallically. The door was made of steel!

AT the same instant that the door was closed and locked, tiny jets of flame appeared in various parts of the room. Some were near the floor, others high up at the ceiling. These seemed to spread with amazing rapidity, and suddenly the Bat saw that he was practically surrounded by fire.

The tongues of flame grew larger by the second. Some were slowly moving across the floor.

The Bat examined the locked door and saw that it was impossible to blast away any lock because there didn't seem to be any—not on the inside. He stepped to the exact middle of the room, figured out just where those bullets had come from, and tried to approach that wall.

The flames drove him back. He had, by rough estimate on his part, no more than five or ten minutes to get out of this inferno or be consumed by the fire.

Working fast, he tipped the desk back on its four legs, got behind it and slid the heavy piece of furniture across the room until it struck the wall with a terrific wallop. It bounced back and that was all. He ran to the other side and slammed it against the opposite wall with similar discouraging results.

Twice he had to stop and beat out flames that licked at his cape. Soon he would be forced to dispense with it—the hood, too, because the heat was becoming almost unbearable.

The Bat worked on one theory—that whoever had been in that room had used a secret door to make his escape. He had fired from a hidden room to keep the Bat in check until the killer could close the steel door and turn on whatever electrical impulse set off these many fires that were now blending into one mighty conflagration.

He removed his gloves, set his teeth against the heat and flame, and went to the wall from which the shots had emanated. Flames were not yet eating at the whole wide wall expanse, but it would not be long before they did. Covering his eyes with a crooked elbow, he used his right hand to feel gently along the surface of the wall.

His fingertips hardly seemed to touch the wall at all, yet the remarkable sensitiveness he had developed during his real blindness served well now. He detected the faintest crack in the plaster. Running his hand along this he could visualize just where the secret door was located.

He could no longer see, because the dense smoke obscured even his clear vision. Those inquisitive fingers sought the means of opening this door. but there seemed to be none. Steeling himself to avoid panic, he returned to where the

desk had been located.

The fire was worse here, but he did not approach the wall. Instead, he went down on his hands and knees to examine the floor. One section of board seemed to have been inserted in small pieces no more than six inches long.

He stood up and pressed his foot against these. The Bat was badly worried for fear that electrical impulses operated the hidden door and that the juice was gone, either burned out, or turned off by the killer.

Then one of those sections of flooring gave way a fraction of an inch. He heard a faint click and dived headlong toward that secret door.

The fire was terrific now. He heard the ceiling crackle ominously as though it were ready to crash down. But now the secret door was open and he darted through it, only to be met by another circle of fire. The whole place must have been set at the same moment.

There was a visible door out of this secret room, though, and he raced to it. It was locked. The upper half was made of glass and he broke this through with the butt of his gun. A surge of heat and flame reached in to greet him. The pool hall was an inferno.

HE knew that the stairway would be gone. That was so old and dry that it could have been started with a match. Much as he wished to examine the premises, particularly the hidden room, to do so would have been tantamount to suicide.

The Bat's main problem now was to get out of this place, to reach cool, fresh air. He was almost reeling under the dense fumes and lack of oxygen.

Racing to the rear of the place he saw windows overlooking a rear court. There were tenements on the other aide and enterprising tenants had attached clothes lines to the wall of this building where the Bat was trapped. He raised a window, leaned out and seized one of these lines. It ran across the court to a veranda on the third floor of the tenement building. Quickly he cut the rope, retied it. then took a firm grasp. If the pulley at the other end was weak or the rope too weather-beaten to support his weight, he might be doomed to a crash on the pavement below. Yet he had to take the chance. It was either that, or face the inexorable flames that were licking at his clothing again.

He crawled out the window, sucked in some comparatively fresh air, and let go. He dropped down at a heartbreaking speed, reached the end of the rope, and felt the pulley and hook give way.

A veranda seemed to be approaching him at express train speed. He stuck his legs out straight and soared right over the railing, skidded along a porch and hit the further rail so hard that some of the uprights buckled under the impact.

Rising swiftly, he made his way down the steps, reached the court and seemed to fade away as sirens announced the approach of apparatus, and tenants suddenly began to shout the news about a fire next door.

He whipped off his hood and cape, stowed them away and put on his soft, wide-brimmed hat. Darting up an alley, the Black Bat took a quick look out on the street. Silk and the car were no longer there. If the car had been in sight and Silk not, the Bat would have unhesitatingly plunged back into the burning structure, sure that Silk had entered it to search for him.

He retraced his steps, climbed a couple of fences, and reached a side street. There he waited for a few minutes, and then he saw the car roll slowly along.

The Black Bat gave a shrill whistle and raced toward the coupé. The door opened as he neared it. Hopping aboard, he sank back against the cushions, and Silk stepped hard on the accelerator.

"Gosh!" Silk panted. "I tried to get in by the front way, but I couldn't. The whole staircase was gone. I ran around to the back, and I saw you climb out of the window. I waited until you landed on that veranda, then I beat it back to the car and drove around the block. What happened in there?"

"I'm not sure," the Bat told him. "I may have bumped into our invisible man, but if I did, he displayed none of his powers. He must have heard me, or I unwittingly stepped on a signal of some kind. Anyway he fled into a secret room, checkmated me in a gun battle, and managed to lock me in the room. There was some kind of a device set up and ready to turn the whole building into a torch. It worked by pushing an electric light button."

"Didn't you get a look at him, if he wasn't invisible?" Silk asked.

"All I saw was his forearm. No way of identifying anyone by that, but I did manage to pick up something, Silk. This typed list was on the desk."

THE Bat smoothed the crumpled piece of paper.

"This contains the names of various large businesses where a lot of money is ordinarily handled," he said "Big department stores, an armored car service, the headquarters of a restaurant chain, and similar concerns. I think I'm beginning to understand what the invisible man's objective is, and Silk, if he ever gets away with this, law and order is practically doomed.

"Speaking of law, drive to the courthouse—the one where young Leslie's case was tried this morning. I managed to get a glimpse of several documents which Leslie is alleged to be using in the blackmail scheme. One has a lot to do with Gombell, the chauffeur who died in the lab last night. I want to study that paper."

"Whatever you say," Silk answered, "but I think you ought to rest up a little after what you went through."

"Rest? While a criminal like the one we're fighting runs loose? Oh no, Silk... And here's another little item. It was the only thing in that desk."

The Bat held a flat key in his palm. He bounced it up and down a few times, shrugged, and put it in his pocket.

Both of them invaded the deserted courthouse. An iron gate closed off the entrance, but the Black Bat opened that in thirty seconds. They ran lightly along the marble corridors. The Bat knew the layout perfectly. His own office as D.A. had been in the building, and every corner was familiar to him.

He stopped in front of the court clerk's office and performed another miracle with the lock. Inside, he was confronted by a big safe. He merely stepped up to it and turned the dials.

"But, sir"—Silk gaped—"you never told me you could crack a box—I mean open a safe."

"I can open this one, Silk. I used to keep some of the state's evidence in it. Circumstances are playing right into my hands tonight. Now"—he pulled open the heavy door—"we'll have a look."

In a moment he held the sheaf of papers in his hands. Placing them on a desk he rapidly thumbed through the documents, uttered a grunt, and went through them again. Then he raised his eyes and looked at Silk.

"The papers that concerned Gombell are gone. Someone stole them before the court clerk entered them as evidence. The last I remember George Potter was hanging on to those papers for dear life. His stooge, Rasely, was at his side. Proctor was there, too—with Charters."

"What about young Leslie?" Silk queried. "He must have been around and if he got rid of that set, it wouldn't hurt his case any. Not with Gombell found dead on a park bench."

"You're right. We've got to take everyone and everything into consideration now. I'll replace these, lock up, and we'll get back to the lab."

CHAPTER XVI
The New Racket

NEXT morning, at ten o'clock, Mark and Son's huge department store was roaring with business. Upstairs, in a suite of offices, Hugh Mark was employed in going over the receipt records of the previous day. His secretary called on the inter-office communicating system.

"A Mr. Jones to see you, sir. Insists that it is vitally important. No sir, he doesn't look like a salesman." The girl dropped her voice. "In fact he looks like the owner of a bank, and he's quite impatient."

"Send him in," Mark said, and a moment later agreed with his secretary's judgment of men.

His visitor was big. He had gray hair, plenty of it, and he wore expensive clothes. A huge diamond sparkled on one finger and the head of his cane was made of gold and ample in size and weight.

"Well, sir?" Mark greeted him. "Have a chair. I don't think I know you, Mr. Jones." He laughed. "There are so many people named Jones."

The stranger sat down, pulled up his trouser legs with care lest he disturb the razor-sharp crease, and favored Hugh Mark with a broad grin.

"Yes, aren't there?" he said blandly. "That's what I thought when your secretary demanded my name. Jones is quite as good as any."

Mark pushed his chair back.

"So you wheedled your way in. Well, I refuse to buy any line you have to offer. Now get out. I'm a busy man."

"You'll buy my line," the man who called himself Jones said casually. "Of course you have read of the raids performed by the invisible man... Yes, I can see you have. It's in the headlines of your morning paper right there on the desk. Would it interest you to know that I represent the invisible man?"

Mark's jaw dropped. "You mean—him? You have the gall to come here and admit—"

"Now don't reach for the phone," Jones snapped. "It won't do you a bit of good to have me arrested, because I don't know who the invisible man is. I have never seen him, any more than the police did when they were allegedly guarding the tiara at those auction rooms yesterday. No amount of pressure could make me tell something I don't know. Why don't you listen to my proposition? It's interesting and not so bad."

"W-well—" Mark let go of the phone. "Go ahead. Wh-what is it?"

"How much would you pay not to be robbed, Mr. Mark? No—don't grab the phone again. If I'm arrested, your store will be looted every day until several million dollars are taken. Don't forget, the invisible man can go anywhere. He could even pick the money out of your several hundred cash registers if he wished to fool around with petty cash. He isn't so inclined, but he will wait until you are ready to ship your cash to the bank—and then it will vanish right from under your sniveling nose. For heaven's sake, man, get a grip on yourself! He won't murder you—unless you become too stubborn."

"Mur-murder me? H-how much does he want?"

JONES leaned back and smiled benignly.

"That's better. Now let's see. Your receipts for yesterday totaled a quarter of a million dollars.

That wasn't a particularly good day for you. Suppose we say that you donate yesterday's receipts to a little fund. It's just a simple matter of insurance, my dear fellow. Pay up and you will not be robbed. Refuse, and you'll probably go bankrupt. Insurance companies will cancel every policy in a week. What do you say?"

"I'm confused." Mark passed a hand over his eyes. "I—I can't think. This is something I never thought could happen. Not in this day and age."

"Ah! You're way behind the times." Jones chuckled. "Modern inventive genius has enabled someone to adopt the cloak of invisibility. But there's no hurry. I'll give you until tonight, let's say. The cash on the line tomorrow at this same hour. I'll call for it in person. And Mr. Mark—need I warn you that all the police in the world will be of no avail? Just read the account of the invisible man's work so far and be convinced. Good morning, Mr. Mark."

Jones arose, drew on yellow gloves, thrust his cane under one arm and sauntered out. Mark gave him about five minutes, then began yelling.

"Get me the police! Get me the store detectives! No—no—wait! That won't do."

He went back into his office, slammed the door, and sat down. What had that Mr. Jones so blandly said? That perhaps the invisible man would murder Mark if he didn't obey? Mark began to feel most uncomfortable. He called his secretary.

"Never mind what I just shouted," he ordered. "I—wanted to see how my staff would—er—respond in an emergency. Bring me some aspirin tablets and then order my car brought round. In a hurry."

Mark believed he had figured things out pretty well. This called for craft and cunning. He would visit the highest police official, put the whole thing up to him and demand secrecy. In that way the invisible man might be trapped. And should that trap fail, there would be no inkling that Hugh Mark had tried to betray him.

POLICE COMMISSIONER WARNER chatted with Silk Kirby as he removed his hat and coat in the hall of the Quinn residence. Then he went into Tony Quinn's study and shook hands with the blind man.

"Glad to hear you've gone into private practice again, Tony," he said, "even though your case took a bad turn. McGrath told me about it. Something ought to be done about this man Potter. He has enough money to mind his own business, but it seems that whenever someone important gets into trouble, Potter is right there to see that justice is done and influence doesn't get the culprit out of the jam. I suppose we should call that a worthy endeavor, but things of that nature should be left to the police and the courts. I suppose Potter is a bit cracked."

"I can't understand it," Quinn said seriously. "I believe in young Leslie. He's like his father, honest and square. Oh well, there's plenty of time to iron it all out. Gives me something to think about anyhow. I need it. Before I made up my mind to resume a limited practice, I began to feel like a pretty useless person."

"Tony," Warner said, "I came to discuss something with you. About a new criminal we call the invisible man. I understand you were around when he pulled one of his jobs. We're flat up against it. The crimes are positively uncanny. McGrath, levelheaded as he is, believes this crook actually is invisible. And when McGrath is convinced, there must be something to it. Bad as that may be, the case has developed into something much worse. Mr. Hugh Mark, who owns one of the biggest department stores in town, just paid me a visit and in the strictest confidence told me that the invisible man had sent an emissary with the weirdest proposition I've ever heard of."

"Just a minute, Commissioner." Quinn smiled broadly. "Why are you telling me this? Because you think I'm the Black Bat?"

"*I* think you are the Bat?" Warner countered. "No, Tony. I'm convinced you're blind. But sometimes when I talk to you about things, they become clearer in my mind. You've got a brain, too, and your suggestions often bear fruit. Of course I don't think you are the Black Bat. If I did, as a sworn officer of the law, I'd be compelled to arrest you, wouldn't I? Certainly. Now forget all this, although I don't mind admitting I wish the Black Bat were here, and that you were he."

"Go on." Quinn laughed. "This is getting interesting."

"Well," said Warner, "this ambassador from the biggest crook we've ever encountered had a flat statement to make. He suggested that Mark pay, to keep his store from being robbed. What do you think of that?"

"Amazing!" Quinn's smile faded. "I wonder how many others have been approached and haven't dared to come to you about it?"

He was thoughtfully silent a moment, then he said grimly:

"Commissioner, this could develop into something beyond control. Let's assume there is an invisible man. He could pull any job he wished. Let's also assume that most people in town firmly believe such an invisible man exists. Any one of them would be willing to pay up, to avoid trouble with him. How much did he ask from Mark?"

"A mere quarter of a million.... Tony, in my opinion you were the cleverest D.A. we ever had. Your mind works so smoothly that you instantly grasp all details. What would you suggest now that I do?"

"No suspects?" asked Quinn, without directly answering. "Inside men employed by Mark, I mean?"

WARNER helped himself to a cigarette on the table beside the blind man.

"Yes," he said. "Miraculously there is one suspect. The first time the invisible man has slipped. This ambassador of crime told Mark just what his gross receipts were for the previous day's business. This occurred right after the store opened, and only one man, except Mark, knew what the figure amounted to. There's a cashier—been with the store a long time. He alone knew that figure, and he must have transmitted it to the invisible man—unless there actually is someone in existence who can't be seen, and who simply stood over the cashier's shoulder as he compiled the figures."

"In each job the invisible man has pulled, someone died," Quinn said. "My hunch is that those victims were the inside men working with the crooks. This cashier is just another poor fool. Why not arrest him, hold him quietly—and see what happens? If the invisible man doesn't rob Mark, then, you can bet he's not quite as misty a character as he lets on. No one, so gifted, would require any help."

"I'll do it," Warner agreed. "I'll have that cashier quietly picked up at once. Mark is to give his answer to the crime ambassador tonight. I'll tell him to make it a flat rejection. That will take some convincing, because the man is scared stiff, but he also doesn't want to hand out a quarter of a million dollars for the questionable privilege of not being robbed... You know, Tony, the Black Bat is working on this case. I'd expect any advice you gave me to be according to his way of thinking. Well—I'll get on with it. Thanks for the help."

After Warner left, Quinn sat in deep thought for many minutes. Finally he called Silk into the room.

"You heard what Warner just told me, Silk," he said. "Perhaps there's the one crack in the invisible man's armor we've been looking for. It's still early afternoon. I'll arrange to see Mr. Mark—as the Black Bat of course—and try to show him a way out of his troubles. You'll be in on the ground floor, Silk. I want you to put on your other disguise—the one that used to lure con men along. Of course with it making you look so much like a country bumpkin you must tame it down a bit.

"I'll give you the 'go ahead' signal after I talk to Mark. So here is what to do. His cashier is going to be fired. You'll take his place, as a new man in the store. I'll have Mark arrange everything. When the invisible crook's contact with the store disappears, as he will, the invisible one will have to look for another stooge. You'll be it.

"Go out to the haunts of those con men tonight. Let on you've just got a new job, and you want to see if your luck holds in gambling. Lose, Silk, as you've never lost before. Pretend you've got more cash. Go to the store and loot the funds. It will be all right. Keep on playing and losing.

"Those con men who work for the invisible crook will think they're in luck, running into you. Mark, they will likely decide, must be taught a lesson for his refusal to pay the quarter million. They won't be able to wait long before they pull the job against the store, and I'm hoping you'll be picked as the one they'll need to help them."

Silk nodded. This was a game to his liking.

"I get it, sir. They'll think I robbed the safe for money to gamble with. That'll be their hold on me. It ought to work out. I'll get set. and go on the job as soon as I hear from you."

CHAPTER XVII
Willing Stooge

LATE that afternoon Silk found himself being escorted around the store and introduced by Hugh Mark, the owner, as the new cashier. The Black Bat's talk had convinced the merchant what course was best for him to follow.

Silk was installed in a small office near the credit department on the fifth floor. At once he busied himself with the various duties he was supposed to perform, and at closing time he walked out with the other help.

Silk knew just where to go. It took him no more than half an hour to find a dice game. Well supplied with money, he made large, and rather foolish bets. Sometimes he won, but mostly he lost.

Among the men in the game were two of the con men associated with the invisible crook. Silk never even glanced in their direction.

He did confide in a couple of the other players, however.

"What if I have lost five hundred already?" he said grandly. "The night's young. I'm just starting. Anybody know where there's a little bird cage?"

Bird cage, Silk knew, was one of the best known methods to trim suckers and constantly in use by the con men who seemed to form the invisible crook's gang. Loopey, the man with the black eye was one of those who had been watching Silk. He elbowed over to where Silk stood at the dice table.

"Maybe the stakes here are too low," he suggested. "Now I know a joint where ... Well. if you're looking for the big time—"

"Lead me to it." Silk stuffed his money into his pocket. "I'm either going to be taken over tonight or I'll bust somebody's bank. Let's go."

Loopey took him to another place, better protected and frequented by gamblers who had more

money to risk. Silk wondered what Loopey would have thought if he'd known that the sucker he was bringing in could probably take them all over. Silk met several other members of the mob, all well known to him, though he indicated none of this and they had no remotest idea of his real identity.

His bankroll went fast here. In about an hour he threw his last five dollar bill on the table and it vanished via the croupier's rake.

"Well—" Silk dug both hands into his pocket—"I asked for it. Just because I got me a good job with the Mark Department Store today I figured my luck would hold. I wonder what that old codger—Mark, I mean—would think if he saw his new cashier blow in all his dough like this?"

There were murmurs of sympathy, offers to hold any game until he could get more money, and Silk pretended to react to the suggestion. He frowned, walked the floor, and finally ended up by watching a slim, young man win two thousand dollars in fifteen minutes. The winner was a shill—a plant—and Silk knew it. They were gunning for him now.

"Tell you what I'll do, boys," he said. "I know where money grows, so I'll go pick me a pocketful. I'll be about an hour. Now don't go away, because I'm out for revenge."

Silk took a taxi from the gambling house, but dismissed it several blocks from the big store. He ambled along, glancing in shop windows every now and then. All to give the two men who trailed him a good chance not to lose the scent.

With a key Silk opened the side door to the big department store and stayed inside for twenty minutes. When he emerged, he was smiling. He hurried back to the gambling place. His two shadows clung to the trail.

SILK waved a wad of bills when he walked in. There were smiles on every side, for a lamb was being led to the shearing. Only this lamb was not quite as dumb as the foolish expression that seemed to mirror his inner self would suggest.

Silk never lost money faster in his life. Everything about the game was crooked, but he made no protest. It was two A.M. when he finally threw up both hands and sat down in a chair.

"Well boys," he said, "I'm clean. Not sore either, but I know a guy who is going to be burned up tomorrow. Imagine working for a guy one day and swiping six thousand bucks from him—just like that? Oh well, I lost my other jobs the same way, and references are easy to fake. Say—will one of you good Samaritans loan me enough to take a cab home?"

One of the con men, whom Silk knew as "Chappie," stepped closer, and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"Would you be interested in getting that six grand back—with about twenty grand for a bonus?"

Silk grinned. "Since when did high class gamblers take to an opium pipe? Quit kidding."

Chappie grasped Silk's arm and lifted him out of the chair.

"Listen, chump, I'm not kidding. There may be even more than that in it for you. You'll earn it, don't fear, but you won't be in any worse spot than you are in right now. Want to listen?"

Silk nodded. Chappie escorted him into one of the small back rooms. Other members of the gang also assembled, and Silk had an idea that if he heard out their offer and then refused, he might not leave the place alive.

"We're taking a chance on you," Chappie said, "but you seem to be a sport. You work for the Mark Department Store. Swell. You're the new cashier. Okay. Tomorrow night you'll be checking all the dough—the whole day's income. It's your job to get it ready for the bank's armored trucks.

"Now here's the angle. Get that dough in one nice pile and wrap it up just as if it was a dozen pairs of pajamas or something. Use store paper and store string. Put that bundle of dough on the dry-goods counter that's just outside of your office. Have it there at five minutes to five right on the dot and don't pay any attention to what happens after that. The take will run over a couple of hundred grand. Your cut will be one-third. Is it a deal?"

Silk whistled sharply. "It sounds good. Simple too, but I don't know. There's always a big risk. Soon as the money is missing, I'll be grabbed, won't I?"

"If you're sap enough to stand around and let them get you," Chappie said sourly. "Here's the rest of the set-up. At five o'clock that bundle will be gone. You fuss around, then let out a yell. Say you had the dough right in front of you—that you turned your. back and when you looked again, it wasn't there any more.

"Push alarm buttons, yell your head off. In the excitement all you have to do is step over to the freight elevator which will be right on the floor level. Get in, ride to the basement and scram. We'll take care of the elevator for you."

Silk thought it over for a time.

"Maybe I might do that," he said slowly, "but somebody has to make good on six thousand dollars first thing tomorrow—and I need a little more time to give this a good think."

"We'll give you the six grand. As for time to think it over, that's okay too, but you stay right here with us until it's time to go to work in the morning. Once you're in that office, remember this. There will always be one or two of us hanging around, and If there's a tip-off, you get it—right between the eyes. Now go ahead and mull it over. There's lots of time."

SILK groaned to himself. Here was a situation for which he had not been prepared. He didn't even know if this was a job set up by the invisible crook or just something cooked up by these con men. The invisible man had never been mentioned.

Silk wanted to report to the Black Bat, but there seemed little likelihood of getting a chance. The con men had nibbled at the bait, swallowed it whole, but had swallowed Silk, too.

He began to deal himself a game of solitaire. Six men made themselves comfortable, peeling off their coats and exposing shoulder holsters and heavy guns. Silk had never known a con man to carry a weapon before. The invisible crook had certainly convinced this crowd of what he could do, had made them much more dangerous, too, for they were intelligent men, not the ordinary run-of-the-mill type of thug with more brawn than sense.

No wonder the jobs pulled so far had been smooth. Silk couldn't have worked them better in his heyday.

Thoughts such as these were not comforting. Silk could carry on, but the knowledge of the Black Bat's imminent presence would have been encouraging.

Silk worried about what would happen after the robbery he was supposed to fake in the morning. He remembered that three other men, involved in these schemes, had died violently. Silk had no desire to become Number Four....

While Silk Kirby was busy ingratiating himself into the confidence of the invisible man's gang of con men, Tony Quinn was at work in his laboratory. The mystery of Gombell's death was still unsolved, and so long as that was the case, Quinn would worry over the possible presence of an alien force in the privacy of the lab.

He examined the sleeve of the dead chauffeur's shirt first. Under a large and high powered glass, he discovered a tiny slit, showing where the poisoned needle had passed through the cloth. To make doubly certain, Quinn carefully dissolved minute fragments of a waxy substance adhering to the material, and tested it for the poison which had killed Gombell.

He was certain now that the needle had passed through the shirt sleeve, but when he examined the coat sleeve, he could find no such indication. The fabric was softer than that of the coat, of course, and a needle might have gone through without leaving a trace, but chemical analysis failed to show that the needle had been shoved through the coat.

Quinn worked and thought a long time. And at last he leaned back with a long sigh. He knew the secret of Gombell's death, and it did not necessarily involve the aid of the invisible man.

Next he looked carefully at the key which be had discovered in the desk just before fire turned the pool room he had entered into a deadly trap. Finally he called Butch on the phone and when the big fellow arrived, the key was turned over to him.

"This," Quinn said, "can be checked quite easily. The manufacturer is right here in town. Try to trace the ownership of the key, Butch, and let me know as soon as you discover anything. Shouldn't take you more than an hour or two."

Butch hurried off and Quinn picked up his cane, returned to the study, and became a blind man again. He had long ago learned that while posing as being blind that he could think deeper and better.

His mind went over the whole case from its beginning, when he had learned of the theft of Bob Leslie's papers. Most of all, he wondered why those documents pertaining to Gombell should have been stolen. Unless—he pursed his lips at the thought—Proctor was behind that, because he didn't want it known that his own chauffeur had been mixed up with the gang.

It was highly possible that Gombell had been not only an easy, but a willing victim for the wiles of the invisible man. Gombell had accumulated a fairly bad record during his short lifetime.

CHAPTER XVIII
House of Magic

FOUR o'clock arrived, and Butch returned, proud of his success. In the lab he told Quinn the history of that key.

"It was made by the Spring Lock people on a big contract job for the Atlas Company. They make strongboxes and safes. I checked with them, and this key was part of the equipment sold to Bob Leslie about a year ago."

Quinn took the key and studied it under a low-powered microscope.

"A year ago, eh?" he repeated. "But this key doesn't show a sign of ever having been attached to a key ring. Those fasteners and rings form grooves in the metal. Someone carried it around loose."

"If you ask me." Butch said, "it makes things look not so hot for young Leslie. Maybe he did swipe his own stuff. Maybe he's the invisible man. That could be, I guess."

"It could," Quinn admitted slowly. "I think I'll go see Charters. As law partners with Bob's father, he might know something. although I can't mention this key. That's all for now, in case Silk calls in. That won't be for some hours though."

Quinn phoned for a taxi and had the driver help him to the cab. He gave orders to be driven to Charters' home. As the cab rounded a corner, Quinn spotted a shiny sedan behind them. They made two more turns and still that car stayed close.

Tony Quinn grasped the head of his cane until his knuckles gleamed white. He was being followed!

Was it possible, despite what he had just learned in his laboratory, that the invisible man *had* been present? That he knew Tony Quinn was the Black Bat, and had posted a sentinel and shadow to watch every move he made?

Quinn relaxed. If that were true, then he would fight in the open even If he had to reveal his dual character. The invisible man was a menace who must be downed.

He reflected idly that he had never been to Charters' home before as he drove up and was helped from the taxi. Charters was in, and glad to see him. Quinn was led into a massive library, the walls of which were adorned with dozens of excellent photo studies of movie stars of a past day. Tony Quinn saw them, although his eyes seemed so utterly blank. He noticed one picture of Charters himself behind a movie camera.

He sat down, accepted a cigarette and a light.

"I've been wondering," he said, "if we know everything we should about young Leslie. He told me about bow he safeguarded those papers and I can't see how in the world anyone could have reached them without leaving some trace. No matter how we regard Judge Leslie, we know less about Bob. I'm wondering if it's possible that he became mixed up with some bad influences and sold that information, You know better than I how he's been living these last few years."

Charters looked solemn. "The same thing occurred to me, Tony," he admitted reluctantly. "I hated to think of it but, as you say, we can't pass up a point. I've known the Judge and Bob for—let's see—seven years now. During that time the boy has never been in any hot water, financial or otherwise. He belongs to several clubs that are expensive, but he did have a good practice. Incidentally that's shot to pieces now. Suppose we have a chat with him, sort of feel him out just to be sure about things?"

"Excellent idea," Quinn said.

But he hardly heard Charters. Someone was on the front porch, someone who was trying not to make much noise. Quinn thought of that mystery car which followed him from his home. Were the invisible man's aides convinced that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat and were they prepared to end that menace to them now? The suggestion sent shivers up his spine.

THEN the doorbell buzzed. Charters answered it, and came back with Nick Rasely in tow. The burly private detective was smiling crookedly and twirling his hat nervously.

"It's Rasely—Potter's police force," Charters smiled shortly. "Says he has something important to tell us. Go ahead, Rasely. It will have to be good. I've half a notion to kick you out of here right now."

"You'll be sorry if you do," growled the detective. "I can tell you how Potter and me got on the trail of them papers we found in Bob Leslie's desk."

"Sit down, Rasely," Quinn said. He looked in the general direction of the private detective, but his stare was that of a blind man. "I suppose there are financial considerations involved, eh?"

"If you mean I want dough for the info, you just said a mouthful. Potter pays me, but he sure looks over the expense account and yells if I take a cab two blocks. I'm sick of that guy, see? You make it worth my while and I spill the beans."

"How much, Rasely?" Quinn asked

"Say, a grand. A thousand bucks. That ain't much to keep a nice young kid like Leslie outa prison. I just want to say this—the guy who tipped us I don't know, but I know where he hangs out."

"It's worth a thousand dollars—after we investigate," Quinn said. "Go ahead and tell us. Don't worry about being paid. We're not private detectives."

"Yeah—yeah, I know you're on the square," Rasely said. "Only I don't want to go back to that place. It gives me the jeeps. But if you go, you follow Meadow Lane right out to the end. That's practically in the sticks, see? There's a two-story house—you can't miss it because it looks like a good windstorm would blow it over. But don't kid yourself. The place is sure fixed up inside.

"I was there. Couple of days ago Potter gets a call and he sends me out there. I rang the bell and the door opened all by itself. Spooky, see? I went in and a guy I couldn't see told me just how to find them papers. That's all there was to it, Do I get the thousand bucks?"

"Later."

Quinn suddenly twisted his head slightly. Those sensitive ears of his had detected a slight sound just outside the window. He had a fleeting glimpse of a skinny, hawk-like face and malevolent eyes. Potter, the one man reform committee. More noises indicated that Potter had seen or heard all he wished, and was now in rapid retreat.

"Charters," Quinn said suddenly, "will you hand me your phone? I think Commissioner Warner should know about this. It's a police matter."

"I agree," Charters said, "but I also insist that we go out there to look over that place. Have Warner pick us up. Rasely can stay here if he wishes. I'll have my butler keep an eye on him. If his information is correct, I'll write him a check as soon as we get back."

Warner and McGrath appeared twenty minutes after Tony Quinn had phoned. Aided by Charters, Quinn entered the big police car. McGrath eyed him narrowly.

"So you're going to get in on it after all, eh, Quinn?"

"That's right." Quinn smiled gently. "But between

you and me, Captain, I wish the Black Bat was along, too."

"We won't need him," McGrath retorted. "Two squad cars are already on their way to case this joint you told us about. They'll keep out of sight though, but if things happen, we'll be glad they're around."

WARNER watched traffic flash by as the driver used a siren and plenty of speed.

"Tony," the commissioner said, "I hate to bring this up, but don't you think that if you remained in the car—"

Quinn laughed curtly. "Don't worry. I'm not going to make a blind target of myself for any sharpshooters. I notice, from the worry in your voice, that you feel as I do—that this may not only be the lair of the man who stole Leslie's papers, but also the headquarters of your invisible man."

"What?" Charters cried. "Well, I'll be darned! My mind was toying with the same idea, but I didn't want to mention it because I thought you'd think I was crazy. Yes, I'm convinced the invisible man is back of it all—all Leslie's mess, too. He operates through intimidation and that is usually the result of blackmail. Wish to the devil I had a gun. Our mutual friend Proctor should be here, too. He was a deputy sheriff out West, you know. Crack shot and all that. Got himself shot up a few times. Ever notice his left shoe, Tony? It's built up. The man is lame, although he never mentions it."

"That's news to me," Quinn said, but there was turmoil inside him that didn't show in his voice.

Proctor lame! Butch and Carol had said that the invisible man walked with a limp—so noticeable that it could be heard in the sound of his footsteps.

The police car turned into Meadow Lane, far beyond the outskirts of the city. It was rapidly growing dark, but the driver did not use headlights. He stopped about a thousand yards down the road. Ahead of them they could see the bleak outlines of an old house, heavily gabled and sadly in need of paint. Around it, weeds and wild flowers had mastered what was once a lawn.

McGrath drew a gun and with Warner beside him, similarly armed, they led the way to the house. Charters came up in the car, but Tony Quinn stayed in the car. The driver reconnoitered to the north.

McGrath eyed the place, saw no lights, and walked boldly up on the porch. He pressed the bell and heard it jangle somewhere within. Two or three minutes went by and nobody answered the summons. McGrath drew back to shatter the door, but Warner checked him with a word.

"Wait! If no one is here, we don't want to leave traces of our visit. Scare him off if we do. Have a look at the window, Captain. You ought to know how to break into a house. You've arrested enough men for doing it."

McGrath got the window open, but it took him a long time. They went in cautiously. The smell of chemicals assailed their nostrils. The whole rear of the house seemed to have been converted into a huge laboratory. Occupying a great part of it was a tremendous machine composed of myriad electric bulbs, switches and rheostats. At the far end was a huge screen of glass colored a faint green.

"Holy mackerel!" McGrath gulped. "Do you suppose this is the machine that makes a guy invisible?"

"It looks potent enough to be about anything," Charters said in a hushed voice. "However, I won't even guess as to its significance. What do you think, Commissioner?"

"Search the place from cellar to attic," Warner said. "Don't skip a thing. Hurry it up, too. I want to leave this place intact, and as quickly as possible."

McGRATH started up the stairs. Halfway to the landing he paused, broke out in a cold sweat and leveled his gun. Silhouetted on the wall was a huge shadow. McGrath's linger tightened on the trigger, then relaxed. He went down the steps and took Tony Quinn by the arm. Quinn had groped his way in so quietly that he had not been heard.

"You gave me a scare that time," McGrath said. "Mister, this is some joint. In the next room is the dog-gondest piece of apparatus you ever laid eyes on... Oh, there I go again. Tell me something, will you? Are you the Black Bat? Can you really see?"

"Would you say I could?" Quinn asked and his face was somber. His eyes stared blindly over McGrath's left shoulder. "Forget it, Captain, will you? When no shooting started, I had the driver escort me here and I came in quietly alone. I can't see, but I can smell. Is this a chemical laboratory of some kind?"

"There's everything here," McGrath answered. "I've got to search the upstairs. Be right down."

Warner and Charters joined Quinn. Charters was especially impressed by the layout.

"Rasely, in his eagerness to earn a thousand dollars, certainly put us onto something, Tony," he said. "I'll swear there's a machine in this house that is used to give a man invisibility. If I had the nerve, I'd turn it on."

McGrath came down reporting no signs of anyone. Warner laughed a little nervously.

"Not finding anyone here isn't surprising," he admitted. "Perhaps the man we want is standing right beside us and laughing. I tell you, gentlemen, it would require but little more proof to convince me there *is* such a thing as invisibility.

"But we can't stay here. I'll leave a squad hidden around the place. A two-way radio car will be stationed nearby to send word if anyone comes. We'll wait twenty-four hours, then I'll bring experts out here to examine that apparatus. All I'm hoping

is that the cloak of invisibility is not permanent and that our man will arrive, wholly sound in body. Let's get out of here."

CHAPTER XIX
Round-Up

CALMLY wrapping two hundred and some odd thousand dollars into a bundle, Silk played his cashier role. He tied string around the bundle, tucked it under his arm and strolled out of the small office, noting that it was four-thirty. He placed the bundle on the dry-goods counter where he could see it, and yet in a spot which was seldom visited by customers or clerks.

All day long he had been under observation. The watching men worked in shifts, none remaining more than half an hour, and there were always two of them.

Silk did not dare use the phone in his office. The wire was not direct, and to call Tony Quinn over it was dangerous. He had to see this through by himself.

Quinn, of course, would have missed him and started an investigation. Silk almost turned handsprings about half an hour before he prepared the cash. For Carol Baldwin walked into the store and made a couple of purchases. She never glanced once in Silk's direction, but he knew that there would be help from the Bat now.

Silk watched a small clock on his desk. In two minutes the deadline would have arrived, when he was supposed to raise an awful din over the lost money. Glancing over toward the freight elevators, he saw one lift stop at the floor, saw a man get out and close the doors, then stand there as if on guard. Silk's exit was prepared, anyhow.

He wondered what would happen after he left the store. Would it be another car to crush him, shots from a hidden assassin, or a knife in the back?

The second hand reached the proper moment. Silk stood up and let out a loud yell for help. Everyone on the floor came to a dead stop. Silk grabbed the phone and yelped for the store detectives. He kept yapping about his cash being gone—taken right from under his nose.

As officials closed in, Silk glanced over at the counter where he had left the bundle. It was gone! Silk blinked. So far as he could see, no one had approached that counter. Unless the invisible man had entered the place and taken the cash.

"The money was right here!" Silk pointed to his desk. "I turned my back a minute, and then it was gone. Nobody came in or left the office. It—it's uncanny!"

"The invisible man!" someone shouted. "Nobody can stop him."

Those words created a mild panic. Store detectives did their best to keep customers and employees from racing to the staircases and passenger elevators. Silk sidled out of the office. Now came the most dangerous part of his job. A slim, patent-leather-haired man stepped up to him, and Silk felt a gun prod his side.

"The elevator, stupid. You want to take the rap for this? Scram while you got a chance."

That was what he said, but the gun spoke a different language, though a silent one. Silk knew that if he did not obey, he would probably be shot down.

He wheeled and streaked for the elevator. The man guarding it saw him coming. He started to open the doors. Silk slowed up and stopped. He did not get in. That partly opened door showed that part of the floor space was taken up by a huge crate.

"Run, you crazy dope!" the man by the elevator snapped. "All of us got to get out of here!"

Silk still stood transfixed. The guard grabbed his arm. Silk tried to shake him off, and in a moment they were fighting furiously. Silk, lighter and not as trained a pugilist, was rapidly getting the worst of it. He reeled under one terrific blow above the heart. His opponent closed in, wrapped both arms around Silk and half carried him to the elevator.

THIS time Silk came to life. He broke loose, gave his opponent a shove, and sent him staggering back until he fell into the elevator. A shrill scream came to the man's lips as he realized what was happening.

The moment his full weight landed on the floor, the elevator vibrated under the impact. That huge crate rocked and toppled. The crook, caught beneath it, was instantly crushed by its weight. In the glimpse Silk had, the crate seemed to contain a big electric motor.

Silk's hunch had been right. Those men had been too anxious to have him escape via that elevator. It had been a death-trap.

Silk wheeled and raced for a stockroom. Store detectives were at his heels. He ducked behind a shelter of piled-up crates, hastily removed the disguise from his face, and on his way through an employee's room he picked up a hat that fitted him fairly well.

Detectives and other employees came crashing through the room. Silk merely stepped out from his hiding place and joined them in a search for himself.

As soon as he could conveniently do so, he headed for the exits, but downstairs uniformed police stopped everyone. When Silk saw Captain McGrath storm through the place, he carefully turned the other way. There was no use courting

trouble. Then, like everyone else in the store, Silk submitted to a search and identified himself.

He was permitted to leave.

But Silk did not go, except just beyond the police lines. He waited, pretending to be a curious spectator, while other customers were frisked. Silk saw one of the con men who had been watching him for the last half hour, being passed by the police. When this man left the store, Silk was close behind him.

Outside there was considerable confusion. Reporters and photographers were trying to get in and, failing in that, button-holing everyone who came out.

The con man Silk was following consented to talk.

"It must have been the invisible man," he said blandly. "The cashier swore he had the money one second, and the next it was gone. I don't know how he does it, but the invisible man can make his loot disappear just as easily as he can his body. Darndest thing I ever saw in my life. Believe me, I don't want any part of that thief. Say, did you realize he might be listening to us right now?"

Silk refused to comment when he was questioned. Across the street he could see a car parked, with its motor running. Butch sat behind the wheel. Silk gave a barely perceptible nod and followed the con man. When the man hailed a taxi, Silk waited until Butch drove up, got into the front seat beside him, then took a quick glance in the tonneau.

A man sat there, clad in black and wearing a big-brimmed hat. Silk smiled.

"They wouldn't let me contact anyone, sir. Sorry I couldn't report."

"I knew something like that must have happened," the Black Bat answered. "Otherwise everything went all right?"

"Fine. I wrapped the money into a package and parked it on a counter. Somebody must have taken it away just before I was ordered to give the alarm. I couldn't see who it was, but I suppose the invisible man collects his own loot. They had things arranged so I would run for it, but the elevator I was supposed to take was fixed. If I stepped on it, I'd have been killed by a big crate arranged to fall if the lift vibrated—as from a sudden descent."

The Bat was watching the taxi.

"Just like Banton, Deering and the custodian of that tiara," he said. "The invisible man doesn't want any of his stooges left alive to talk. Have you any idea where we're heading for, Silk?"

"I think so. While they guarded me last night, those con men talked in the trade lingo. I understood it, naturally. They've got another Big Store set up. It's like a stock broker's office where the suckers can be trimmed. If you ask me, I think the gang is getting ready to rope in a few more saps like I pretended to be, hook them plenty, then offer them a way out by helping the invisible man. Of course they never mentioned that crook's name to me. As a rule con men use a Big Store set-up to meet in, if they gang together—which is seldom. This bird we're following is probably heading there right now."

THE taxi pulled up in front of a big office building. Silk was at the con man's heels when he got into the elevator. Silk got out on the same floor, practically walked beside the man until he hesitated and stopped in front of an office lettered to indicate it was the suite of a stock broker's firm.

Silk kept on going, saw a dentist's office and went in. He stayed there a couple of minutes, but before the nurse could approach him, he slipped out again. The con man was gone.

It was early evening and the building was practically vacated except for a few professional men who kept late office hours. The service elevator stopped at this floor. A blur of shadow emerged, and two minutes later every light on the floor winked out.

Someone from that stockbroker's office came out into the hallway. A grim figure moved up behind him. Strong fingers encircled his throat and the man slowly sank into unconsciousness without uttering a moan.

The Black Bat laid him down, drew his guns and quietly moved into the offices. They were high up and no street light filtered through any of the windows. Several matches were constantly kept lighted in an office behind the reception room. It was an ornate layout, the Bat saw, for his eyes could pierce the darkness.

One man, with a gun in his hand, stood guard near the inner door. Suddenly, the gun was yanked out of his grip and in the same fraction of a second a fist struck him squarely on the jaw. He started to topple, but the Bat caught him, eased the man into a chair, then moved toward the inner office.

"Hey!" someone said, "I thought I heard a funny noise outside. Darn these lights. Fine time for them to go out... Loopey, keep your arms on that dough spread out on the table."

"No, Loopey," an unruffled voice contradicted. "Elevate them or I'll put a bullet through that black eye of yours."

"Who is that?" several voices shouted. "Boss, is that you?"

"Don't move, any of you," the Black Bat snapped. "I can see everyone, see just what you're doing. Fancy, take your hand off the butt of that gun."

"The Black Bat!" Fancy inhaled the words and froze. "He can see in the dark."

"You're right," the Bat told them. "I have two guns trained on you. I'll admit one man might experience trouble in holding back fourteen of you, but there are more slugs than that in my guns, and some of you won't leave here—not erect and on

your own two feet."

The Bat was not worried about an attack. Con men have little use for weapons and rarely fight when cornered. They prefer to battle their way out with brains.

"How long do we stand here like this?" Loopey's voice cracked. "Wh-what are you going to do with us?"

There was no reply. Minutes passed and not one of those men moved a muscle. Then flashlights cut the darkness and a horde of uniformed police, headed by McGrath, stormed into the place. Handcuffs clicked. McGrath gathered up the cash that had been stolen from the department store and rubbed his hands in vast satisfaction.

"I don't know who gave me the tip, but I'm darned grateful to him," he said jubilantly. "We certainly made a haul!"

Loopey gave McGrath a derisive glance.

"Smart copper, eh?" he sneered. "The Black Bat did this, not you."

"Captain!" a patrolman called out. "Take a look at these two men we found knocked cold."

McGrath looked, in the glare of flashlights, and saw the familiar stickers of the Black Bat pasted in the center of each unconscious man's forehead....

Silk Kirby drove the car back to Tony Quinn's home, let his passengers off and, after parking the car, joined them in the lab. Tony Quinn, still dressed in his black clothes, but minus the hood and cape, puffed contentedly on a cigarette.

Carol sat beside him, one hand on his arm. Butch was grinning broadly as he spoke.

"I fixed the lights for that floor like you said," he told Quinn. "I'll bet they don't get 'em on again by morning."

"And I phoned McGrath at the department store," Silk said. "He certainly came in an awful rush."

Carol looked at Quinn.

"Tony," she said, "I know you've rounded up practically every member of the invisible man's gang—but he is still free, and we haven't yet solved the murder committed in this very room."

"Oh yes, we have," Quinn said. "It was not murder. Gombell was a desperate man. The charge against him, out West, was enough to put him behind bars for life. He knew it, too. Besides he was deathly afraid of the invisible man's power. When we captured him, you'll recall that his ears were plugged, his eyes covered, and he was gagged. He had no idea where he was, whether in the hands of the invisible man for judgment because of his mistakes, or in custody of the police.

"So Gombell killed himself. He kept that poisoned needle hidden in the sleeve of his jacket. Even though he was tied, it was a simple matter to get that needle out and shove it into his arm. The waxy substance containing the poison melted, released the drug, and Gombell died instantly.

"I can prove the needle penetrated only the shirt sleeve and not the coat. I'll also admit I was doubtful for a moment, even after I had satisfied myself about the cause of his death. When I left the house, I was trailed. I thought perhaps the invisible man had located me, but now I'm sure it was our friend Potter. He must have known Rasely was going to see either Charters or me."

They all looked relieved. Then Carol said:

"Tony, what of the invisible man?"

Quinn grinned.

"We haven't got him yet, but I can tell you this—there is no invisible man!"

CHAPTER XX
Tricks and Fraud

PROCTOR, the attorney, kept running fingers through his slightly grayed hair

"Captain McGrath," he said flatly, "I came to you because I'm now convinced that I am also a victim of the invisible man. I want to state, for the records, that my office safe was forced open some time back and many of my most confidential files stolen. Clients have come to me with complaints of being blackmailed. I didn't want to share Bob Leslie's position, so I kept quiet about it."

McGrath shook his head.

"Then I guess it's up to me to get a warrant. If Leslie is charged with blackmailing his own clients, you can't be made an exception of, even though I'm pretty certain you are not guilty. When this is all finally hashed out, we'll find the invisible man behind it all. The only thing that worries me and compels me to take action, is that maybe you or Leslie are the invisible man. Nobody can be sure."

McGrath's phone buzzed. He answered it, half jumped out of his chair and then hung up.

"Proctor," he said, "we're going to get the invisible man. He has a lab and hide-out which we discovered earlier tonight. I planted men around it and they've disappeared. You can come along. In fact I think I'll make that an order."

McGrath drove a police car to Meadow Lane. Proctor sat in stony silence beside him. Just ahead, in a car with screaming siren. was Commissioner Warner, George Potter, who argued every second about his rights and Warner's high-handed methods, and Charters, who kept telling Potter to shut up. Young Leslie, dejected and silent just looked out of the window. They had all been in Warner's office when the alarm had come.

They approached the house carefully. The radio

car used by the guards was still there, but the policemen had vanished. McGrath stalked up on the porch, gun ready for action. He reached for the door, and jumped back. The door was opening—and there was no one to move it.

"Watch yourselves!" McGrath warned. "Everybody stay close."

They entered the house and proceeded to the laboratory. McGrath checked them with an outflung arm. In the far corner of the huge room was a high-backed chair, back toward them, and from it curled a column of cigarette smoke.

"All right," McGrath called. "Stand up, you—and no tricks."

A cloud of smoke answered him, then the occupant of the chair slowly arose. His hands remained by his sides, for McGrath's gun sagged. It was the Black Bat.

"It took you quite a while, gentlemen," he said. "Welcome to the house of magic and fake."

"Seize him!" Potter yelled. "Arrest him! He's a killer and a crook. The Black Bat has no more right than any other murderer."

"Quiet, Potter," the Bat said. "You're getting to be a nuisance. Where did you ever develop that passion for putting people into jail? It's not possible, I hope, that you take this method of getting rid of people who stand in your way? Or is it just that stubborn, twisted nature of yours that makes you the way you are?"

Potter fell back a pace.

"If—if you think I'm the invisible man... No! Great heavens, no! I'm not! I swear it! I just want to see justice done. Eleven years ago my daughter was killed by a crazy driver. He ran away and left her to die. Did he go to prison? Not him. His father was bigger than the law. They gave him a suspended sentence, and I've sworn to see that nobody get. away with things like that again. But I'm not a thief. You can't accuse me of being the invisible man."

"Why not?" the Black Bat said. "I could, in fact, accuse all of you here, with the exception of Commissioner Warner and Captain McGrath. You see, gentlemen, I know how the invisible man operates, and I know that he is not, never has been, and never will be cloaked with a mantle of invisibility."

A CHORUS of gasps answered him. The Bat walked forward. "Bob Leslie," he said. "lost certain valuable and confidential records. They were stolen by our so-called invisible man's aides. From these they gleaned enough to compel certain of Leslie's clients to cooperate with them. Attorney Proctor lost similar records.

"The invisible man's agents are, for the most part, confidence men of rather good talents. He organized them because they were superior in intelligence to the average crook, and through them he also garnered more stooges. They set up their own peculiar arrangements to lure victims into a trap where they'd lose all their money, probably steal more to get the first back, and so become involved with the gang.

"Now we'll start with the bank robbery. Roy Banton was compelled to obey the invisible man. The night before the robbery he spirited that money out of the bank. The next day he pretended it had been just stolen right out of his hand. I know everything that happened at the bank. Banton had been told he'd be taken care of. His instructions were to reach the roof of the building next door where help would be waiting, and he would quietly vanish. He was ordered to stand on the edge of the roof and look down for certain signals from a window.

"But Banton, though he didn't know it, had been fed a drug over a period of days. This drug will make a man extremely dizzy in high places. Banton was not pushed off the roof. He fell. Banton was in the habit of taking a medicine for his nerves. The killer managed to get into Banton's house and put his drug into that sedative. Banton accidentally broke the bottle so he poured the contents into an aspirin bottle which I obtained and analyzed the contents."

The Black Bat's audience listened intently. Charters began to walk up and down nervously. McGrath chewed on his cigar.

"Next we come to the murder of the bank guard," the Bat went on then. "Also the phenomena of doors that opened by themselves and breezes created by an invisible person passing close by certain witnesses. The bank guard, running for the door, was killed by a knife thrown from the hand. of one of the invisible man's killers. No one saw it streak through the air. The guard, probably killed instantly, kept on running for several steps more before he collapsed.

"The bank door opened, as you will recall. An old trick, a child's trick, but effective in this case. A member of the gang who stood ten feet from the door just hooked a neutral colored piece of cord to the door handle and pulled it at the proper moment. The breezes described in the bank and in the jewelry store and the auction rooms never did exist. If those witnesses are checked, you'll find they belong to the invisible man's gang and were planted."

"But the jewelry store job and the tiara?" McGrath questioned.

"Sleight-of-hand stuff, Captain. The necklaces were purposely brought out. The clerk, Deering, was set to pull the job. The tray containing the jewelry was deep. That was purposely constructed. A false top, identical with the bottom, was dropped onto the jewels. They seemed to have vanished. Deering put up a yell, set off alarms, and created all the excitement he could. Then he removed the jewels from beneath that false top, destroyed the top and

placed the gems where they could be picked up by agents who were to appear.

"My understanding is that a radio car arrived seconds after the robbery. The patrolmen came into the store. Yet, so far as I know, these patrolmen never reported the incident. Why? Because they were part of that gang of confidence men sent to whisk the jewels away.

"Deering suddenly realized that his goose was cooked, that he probably would be murdered just as Banton had been murdered. He pulled a gun, entered a private office as he had been ordered to do, and waited for the rescue party to arrive. One of the gang rapped on the rear door.

"Deering opened it, but he didn't remove the burglar chains nor entirely remove the steel barricade. He was shot, given a hard shove that knocked him into the middle of the room. The barricade fell into its sockets, the spring locked closed and it seemed that no one could possibly have been in that room—no one who could be seen, that is."

HE paused a moment, and Captain McGrath spoke up quickly.

"I guessed that too," McGrath said, "but there was no proof, and the invisible man seemed so doggone real—"

"That's what he wanted it to seem," the Bat answered. "His plan called for the invisible man to become real in the minds of everyone. Then he could begin a campaign of intimidation and force large firms to payoff so that he wouldn't have to rob them. The affair at the auction rooms was similarly handled. The custodian, in the power of the gang, brought that showcase into the room. It was cleverly constructed so that even when torn to pieces the trick would not be exposed.

"Nobody actually saw the tiara. They saw a reflection. By moving a mirror, which was a part of the showcase, the image of the tiara could be caused to vanish. The custodian set up his clamor and passed the tiara to one of the gang before he started the excitement. That man simply walked out with it. The custodian rushed out to what he thought was freedom. They murdered him."

"Never mind the details!" Charters shouted excitedly. "If you know who this crook is, expose him."

Proctor mopped his face. "You can talk all day, but I'm not convinced. I think there is an invisible man. All this machinery and these chemicals—"

"A splendid setting," the Bat said, "to help create the idea that such a miracle exists. The invisible man wanted this place to be discovered."

Every man in the room tugged at his collar. The heat was almost unbearable. Then, suddenly Bob Leslie gave a sharp cry and pointed to the floor. They all looked—and froze in horror.

Directly in the center of the room were footprints. They appeared, just as an invisible man might have made them, as he walked along. In these eerie surroundings the appearance of these prints was enough to chill everyone present with terror.

The Black Bat suddenly ran to the big laboratory bench, grabbed a piece of cloth and hastily swabbed those footprints that had not yet faded out. These did not fade. The Bat stood erect.

"Another trick," he said shortly.

"The invisible man covers the bottoms of his shoes with a chemical, paces the floor first and is sure the room is well heated. In a short time those prints appear out of nowhere, developed by the heat. They fade away rapidly. But I fixed these with another chemical. Now all we have to do is find the man whose shoes—"

Charters suddenly lunged toward the Black Bat, and a knife was in his hand. As it came down, the Bat weaved to one side, buried a fist into Charters' midriff and grabbed his knife hand. He gave it a hard twist and the blade clattered to the floor. McGrath kicked it aside, then pushed the muzzle of his gun against Charters' back. The attorney surrendered, mouthing curses at the Black Bat.

McGrath forced him to step squarely onto those footprints. They matched the cut and size of his shoes exactly.

"TWO things gave you away, Charters," the Bat said quietly. "you used to be a movie cameraman before the talkies came in. You were especially adapted to the so-called special effects stunts. Several ghost pictures were arranged by your talents. Everything you did was just tricks—illusions. Good ones, I'll admit, because you had all the necessary training.

"The sound of footsteps you created was from a phonograph recording. To confuse the issue, you made those steps sound as though a limping man created them. Proctor is lame, but doesn't advertise the fact. You hoped he might at least be suspected.

"Gombell, Proctor's chauffeur, knew who you were, knew your past history, and you took him into the gang because you also knew things about him. Gombell was afraid of you. He committed suicide. Upon his death you became afraid he would be investigated so you stole certain papers from Leslie's file."

"Wait!" Charters yelled. "Wait! You got me—yes. You've tricked me, Black Bat, but I'll expose you! You know too much. You're Tony Quinn, the lawyer who is supposed to be blind. Maybe I'm done, but I've finished the Bat's career too!"

"Perhaps," the Bat said, "you might be wrong. At any rate we're not concerned with that right now. You and I had a gun battle not so long ago You won out

that time, but in your desk was a key. It was one of two made for Bob Leslie's safe deposit box which he kept in his office and where his papers were locked. Bob Leslie still has his key, and he has always carried it on a key ring. The other he gave to his father.

"You and Judge Leslie were partners and close. You were the only man who knew of the existence of the second key, and were in a position to get it without much trouble. You meant to return it, but you didn't. Like all the rest of your breed, success goes to your head and you make mistakes.

"I think that's about all, gentlemen. Commissioner, accept my thanks for bringing everyone here, even though they didn't realize that you and I had framed this meeting. And also for removing your police guard secretly. Hold onto Charters, Captain. The lights are going out."

The Bat had a retreat already open. His car was parked well away from the place. In moments he had reached it and opened the door—looked into the muzzle of a service pistol. Captain McGrath, smiling a bit ruefully, was behind the gun.

"Get in, Bat," he ordered. "This is on the level and it's a pinch. We had no truce. I'm within my rights to capture you and I've done it. I've got the Black Bat."

The Bat didn't move.

"Congratulations, Captain McGrath," he murmured. "I didn't expect this. Warner has the prisoner, I suppose?"

"I cuffed him to the commissioner," McGrath gloated, "and beat it out here. I spotted your car when we drove up. It's all over, Bat. You might as well take off that hood and show me your face—Tony Quinn. Charters was right. You are Tony Quinn."

The Bat laughed softly. "Would you like to lay a little wager on that, Captain? You are so completely sure it should not be much of a risk for you."

"Yes! I'll bet anything, including my badge, that you are Tony Quinn. Come on—take off the hood. You're licked."

"Not yet. There's the wager. You said anything went. Good! I'll bet my freedom against remaining your prisoner that I am not Tony Quinn."

"You're on," McGrath answered. "I know I'm right. How shall we prove it?"

"Why not drive to a telephone? I'll give you my word not to escape. Phone Quinn's home. If he isn't there, I'll take off this hood."

McGRATH stepped on the starter. He put his gun away because he knew that the Black Bat's word was good. They had worked together before, under truce, when McGrath never had made an attempt to unmask the Bat, nor had the Bat tried to harm him.

At the Black Bat's suggestion, McGrath stopped on a side street, entered a drug-store and called Tony Quinn's home.

Silk answered.

"Listen, you," McGrath said. "The game is up. This is McGrath and I've got the Black Bat. I know he's Tony Quinn, but I'm taking up his dare. If Quinn is home, put him on the wire and prove it. And listen—I won't fall for anything like a phonograph recording either."

"But Captain," Silk purred, "Mr. Quinn is, at the moment, taking a bath. This phone is just outside the bathroom. I ... pardon me, sir."

McGrath's face gradually assumed a beet-red hue. Over the wire he heard the sound of splashing water, and then Tony Quinn's querulous voice reached him as plain as if he talked directly into the phone.

"Silk! Silk, who is it? Who is it, Silk?"

"IT'S McGrath," Silk said. "He must be crazy, sir. Says he has you prisoner. I'm sure he's insane, sir."

"Silk!" Quinn's voice came clearly again. "Tell him to wait. I'll be out in a minute. Come in here and hand me a towel, will you? Why in thunder don't you leave them on the towel racks. Can't you remember that I'm blind?"

McGrath hung up. He walked back to the car and found the Black Bat behind the wheel.

"Okay," McGrath said. "You win. I was wrong, and I'll stand back of my word. But listen—next time I've got you, there'll be no bets. I'll chase you into a cell so fast you won't even see the scenery. I— Oh the devil with it! What's the use? I'm glad we made that bet. If it wasn't for you, I'd be chasing invisible men all over town and going nuts doing it, I—"

"Good-by, Captain." The Black Bat chuckled. "I'm sorry you were so wrong. We'll meet again soon. Some bright-eyed crook will try to become a millionaire over night... Oh, by the way, you've been so kind about keeping your word—go to Charters' house. The necklaces and the tiara are in his safe. I left it open for your convenience."

McGrath watched the car disappear. He rubbed his chin and smiled a little. Suddenly, the smile faded. He realized that he was miles from town, where there were no bus lines. McGrath swore and started to trudge...

Tony Quinn, seated in his usual chair beside the fireplace, alternately puffed on his pipe and laughed. Silk howled in glee.

"McGrath even said he'd get wise if I played a recording," Silk howled. "That was a good idea, preparing that record for just such a time. It certainly sounded real, and McGrath couldn't ask questions and try to make you answer because you were in the tub. An ordinary recording would never have got by, sir. This one did and I'm afraid next time I see McGrath, I'll laugh in his face."

THE END

THE BELFRY by Will Murray

Two consecutive Black Bat novels torn from the pages of *Black Book Detective* comprise our latest volume in this suspenseful series. *The Black Bat's Invisible Enemy* and *The Voice of Doom* are typical of the type of tales Norman A. Daniels produced behind the house name of "G. Wayman Jones."

Daniels was frank that the Black Bat was calculated to be an imitation of The Shadow, who dominated the pulp magazine field—as well as what we now remember as Old Time Radio—as it was in 1941. It all started with an assignment from Thrilling Group managing editor, Leo Margulies, late in 1938, months before the debut of Batman, whom the Black Bat closely resembles.

As Daniels once revealed:

> Leo asked me to think of something to compete with The Shadow. I came up with this character I called the Tiger because in the initial episode, the hero had been doused with acid. His face was lined like a tiger's. He wanted to change the Tiger to the Black Bat because he wanted it to go into *Black Book Detective* magazine.

Debuting in 1939, the Black Bat series was the only such hero introduced on the threshold of the 1940s to run clear through the World War II period, and beyond. His dramatic costume, combined with a fantastic origin that left him able to see clearly in the dark, undoubtedly appealed to the generation of readers who were then encountering the first comic-book superheroes of the 1939-41 four-color wave.

"We stayed right in line with what Street & Smith were paying for The Shadow," Daniels once boasted. "Whenever they got a raise, we got a raise. We started with a penny [a word]."

Daniels' payment records, however, reveal a less generous reality. At the start, he was receiving a paltry $250 per novel--approximately a third of Gibson's 1939 fee for penning a Shadow novel of comparable length. Frequent raises lifted that to three and four and five hundred per manuscript. Near the end of the series, Daniels was actually getting $50 more for a Black Bat than Walter Gibson was being paid for The Shadow. And the Black Bat's adventures continued until 1953, whereas *The Shadow* magazine folded in 1949.

Does that mean the Black Bat got the last laugh?

Walter Gibson once commented on the legion of black-cloaked copycats his creation spawned:

> People started asking me, "What do you think of the other things, The Phantom and The Spider, and so on and so forth?" Of course I didn't have time to read any of them. I didn't want to read them. They were just imitations. Without being egotistical, Babe Ruth—they asked him one time which pitchers bothered him the most. He said, "They all look alike to me." So all the imitations of The Shadow look alike to me. They were interchangeable. I never paid any attention to them.

"Now there is a difference between The Shadow and the others," Gibson once joked. "The Shadow was taller, wasn't he?"

While The Shadow had heralded the hero-pulp wave virtually from its 1931 inception, it was the inauguration of the Shadow radio program in 1937 that led to the character's huge multimedia success.

As Walter Gibson once observed, The Shadow went from a household word to household commodity. Radio drama was soon filled with spooky-voiced *doppelgängers*, such as *The Mysterious Traveler* and *The Whistler.*

With the character exploding in popularity, the Thrilling Group was anxious to ride on The Shadow's cloak tails. Nor were they the only ones. In 1939, Munsey released the Green Lama, which was a completely different take on The Shadow. Street & Smith combined Doc Savage elements with The Shadow for The Avenger that same year.

Daniels did his best to write Shadow-style suspense stories, as these two examples demonstrate.

The Black Bat's Invisible Enemy was written in January 1941 and published in the September issue of *Black Book Detective*. Daniels' original title was "The Invisible Menace."

Inasmuch as The Shadow practiced a form of hypnotic invisibility on radio that his pulp counterpart never displayed, this theme was perfect for the Black Bat, who used his ribbed cape to conceal himself in the darkness, much as the print Shadow employed his all-concealing cloak. For a brief period, the Bat wore a black slouch hat over his scar-concealing hood. It soon vanished. Not only was it superfluous, if not a trifle ridiculous, but Street & Smith quite possibly complained. The slouch hat was as much a Shadow trademark as was his hawklike profile and chilling laugh.

Returning immediately after Norvell Page's final Black Bat story, Daniels appears to assert control over the series again with this novel. Starting with this tale, Tony Quinn has returned to his practice as a criminal lawyer, causing Captain McGrath concern that the midnight missions of the Black Bat will come to a screeching halt since Tony will be spending so much time in the courtroom.

This is a new wrinkle in the evolution of the McGrath-Quinn relationship, which is haunted by McGrath's near certain knowledge that Quinn is the Black Bat. In earlier stories, he was determined to unmask Quinn—a single-minded goal he never entirely abandons. But back in *The Black Bat's Justice*, he broke with tradition and sought the crimefighter's help to crack the case. An uneasy alliance is forming. •

A Complete Book-Length Black Bat Detective Novel

THE

A machine gun chattered, but the shots went wild. (CHAPTER XV)

CHAPTER I
Strange Awakening

POLICE COMMISSIONER WARNER, head of the largest police force in the nation, awoke with a start. He sat up in bed, rubbed his gray, rather thin hair, and stared around a strange room. It was a very well-equipped bedroom, with oversize furniture, elaborately decorated walls and bed covers of silk.

The furnishings were equivalent to what the

VOICE OF DOOM

The Black Bat tackles an unseen Nemesis of Society—a Human Scourge who battens on Underworld and Upperworld alike!

average householder spends to equip an entire six room house. There was nothing feminine about the place either. A stag's head was mounted over the bed, ancient cutlasses decorated another wall and there were two hunting pictures in excellent taste.

Warner tried to figure it out. Propping a pillow

back of him, he relaxed against it. The last thing he remembered was leaving a party, getting into his car and starting to drive home. From then on everything was totally and horribly blank. Where was he? Who had brought him here?

Warner climbed out of bed. To his amazement a pair of brand new slippers in his size were waiting for his use. A silk dressing gown was neatly hung over a chair. He donned it, walked swiftly to one of the two doors in the room and tried to open it.

The door was locked. He tackled the other one which proved to be that of a clothes closet and it contained his suit, neatly hung up. His other wearing apparel was also there, and no valet could have taken better care of them.

"I'll be darned," Warner muttered. "This is carrying things too far. Must be a joke, but I don't see the humor in it."

He thought of the windows and dashed over to them only to give a groan of despair. They weren't really windows at all, just fakes to resemble real ones and with artificial light streaming through them to simulate daylight. Outside Warner saw plain gray walls. This room, which held him prisoner, was really a room within a room.

"My gun," Warner said aloud. He hurried back to the closet. His compact, high-powered automatic was still in its hip holster. The bullets were intact. He felt a little better with the weapon in his fist.

Then Warner heard a loud click like that of an electric switch only amplified several times. A voice came from nowhere and everywhere. It filled the whole room.

"Good morning, Commissioner Warner. You had a very nice rest. It's noon—did you realize that? I'm very sorry about the informal manner in which I had to bring you here, but circumstances made it necessary. But here I am talking while you must be starving.

"Please open the door. It was locked when you tried it before. It leads into another room where you will find toilet articles, even to the brand of toothpaste you are accustomed to use.

"There is a table spread with a typical breakfast, the kind you really enjoy. While you eat, I shall outline the reasons why I brought you here."

The voice stopped with another click. Warner shrugged. He went into the next room and stared at the table. There were eggs, prepared just as he liked them, bacon, blackly crisp, which was one of his demands of bacon, fried hominy with syrup, toast, butter and fruit juice. Warner couldn't have asked for a better breakfast. He washed up and then sat down to it.

ORDINARY men might have had no appetite under circumstances such as these, but Warner sailed in with gusto. He heard that familiar click and the same deep, clear voice spoke again.

"I commend your choice of food, Commissioner. It tallies closely with my own likes. Now to business. That is—if everything is quite to your satisfaction. You may speak. I can hear you."

"Thanks." Warner spread butter on a piece of toast. "I don't get this business at all, but if I'm to be kept a prisoner here and the food remains as good as this, well—I'll ask the judge to give you life imprisonment and not the electric chair. Who are you? What do you want? Where am I, anyway?"

"I can't tell you where you are," the voice answered with a chuckle. "My identity must also be held secret, but you may know me as the Voice of Justice.

"I shall show you why I have chosen that name in a moment. All I want from you is a little cooperation. Last night you were drugged with a harmless opiate that leaves no ill effects. Your car is hidden, but will be returned to you. I had you brought here for this conference.

"I'm a strange man, Commissioner. I might be an ex-convict or a philanthropist or even an amateur criminologist. The fact remains that I deplore the number of crimes committed in this country which go unpunished and have decided to do something about them.

"My idea is to expose many of the more important criminals. How I shall accomplish this is my own secret, but it shall be done. Wait and see. Naturally, I cannot associate myself directly with the police and therefore find it essential to contact a man I can trust without the slightest question or doubt."

"And you want me to name him." Warner chased a bit of crisp bacon around the plate. "What's there in it for you, my friend?"

"Nothing! Not a red cent, but there is one small provision attached to it all. These men I shall expose will either have rewards posted for their capture or rewards should be offered. This money is to be turned over to certain designated parties.

"No I'm not one of them. You must understand that I'm quite honest, Commissioner. I could take all of the loot for myself, but I am returning it for the much smaller reward sums involved. These rewards will really go to useful purposes. Now—whom would you recommend?"

Warner sipped delicious coffee.

"Well, I can't say offhand," he said. "I don't know exactly the type of man you want. Give me more details."

"Of course," the voice sounded gratified. "The man I want must be persuasive enough to get those rewards even though none are offered in some cases. He must be thoroughly honest and capable. A man who might not see too much either, and who would

be willing to pass up opportunities to nab me.

"I am not a man of violence, but I shall be compelled to resist forcibly any attempts to discover who I am. This work, to which I have dedicated myself, places me in extreme danger. You can understand that. Now you know the type of person I need. Tell me."

Warner nodded slowly.

"Yes, I think I know the man for you. He's an attorney—which provides the persuasive tongue. He's thoroughly honest, and I guarantee he will not see too much because this man is totally blind. His name is Tony Quinn. He used to be District Attorney, but he was blinded by acid. Of everyone I know, Quinn fills the bill better than any other."

"Good. Good. Splendid, in fact. I shall contact him soon and I am extremely grateful to you. In a few moments you shall be released. There is nothing else you wish to know?"

"No," Warner said thoughtfully. "Nothing you'd tell me, I mean. However, I must warn you that this whole procedure is distinctly outside the law, and you lay yourself open to prosecution. Anyway, thanks for the breakfast and for your faith in me to name the man you want. Now how do I get out—of—here—I—I feel dizzy."

"Don't worry." The voice seemed miles away now. "You have been drugged again. It's the easiest way for me to return you. Tell Mr. Quinn he will be contacted soon. Sleep well, Commissioner."

Warner's head fell on top of the table, knocking a pitcher over and rattling the dishes. From the hidden amplifier, came a hoarse, grim chuckle and then silence.

Warner woke up with a cool breeze fanning his senses alert. He was behind the wheel of his car in some big park. A careful look around told him where he was—in one of the more isolated portions of Central Park. He was fully clothed, his gun was in place.

It all seemed like a dream, but he knew it wasn't. What he'd been through was stark reality, the maddest form of reality, but as true as the sun that warmed him. His dashboard clock indicated that it was three-thirty. He'd been unconscious for three hours.

Warner grunted in exasperation, stepped on the starter and drove straight to his office at Police Headquarters. He wondered how Tony Quinn would take this questionable contract, and if it would bring the Black Bat, enemy of all criminals, into the open once more.

Sometimes Warner thought Quinn was the Black Bat. Other times he would have taken an oath that such a thing was quite impossible and yet—he liked to think that Tony Quinn and the Black Bat were one and the same.

CHAPTER II
Confession of Guilt

THE name on the glass part of the door read: *Anthony Quinn, Attorney at Law.* Police Commissioner Warner smiled as he studied the sign, then he pushed open the door and walked into a nicely furnished anteroom.

There was a desk for a stenographer, another for a clerk. A carved railing separated these working quarters from the small space allotted for clients. There was a trim, brown-haired girl sitting behind the typewriter desk doing nothing. A young law clerk looked up with startled surprise, jumped from his chair and practically fawned on Police Commissioner Warner.

"Hold it," Warner said. "I'm a friend of Mr. Quinn, not a client. There isn't a thin dime in me."

The clerk looked disappointed.

"Yes sir. I'll tell him you're here if you'll give me your name. And would you do me a favor too? I'm just out of law school.

"I needed a job and this looked like a windfall to me, but I didn't know I was going to work for a blind lawyer. I need experience, but what kind of a practice would a blind man have anyway? I'm not trying to be supercilious about this, sir. It's just that I have my own welfare and future to look out for."

Warner opened the gate, pushed the young man back in his chair and looked down at him.

"You're not a native of New York, are you? You'd have heard of Tony Quinn if you were. Listen, youngster, there isn't a better criminal lawyer in existence than your boss. He used to be the District Attorney—the very best we ever had.

"One day he was rendered blind when some crooks threw acid into his eyes, but the loss of a man's sight doesn't necessarily mean that his brain ho. also gone blank. Before you decide what kind of an attorney he is, wait until you see him in action. This is the first day he's been in practice, isn't it?"

"Yes sir—I'll take your advice too, sir. Now I'll announce you if you will give me your name."

"I'm Warner, Police Commissioner Warner, but it won't be necessary to announce me. I'll just prove to you how capable Tony Quinn is. Let me go in, unannounced, and just listen."

"The Police Commissioner! Gosh, sir, I hardly need a further recommendation."

Warner walked to the closed door, opened it and started to walk across the carpeted rug. A man sat behind a big desk in one comer of the spacious office. Each wall was lined with law books.

A mural had been painted on the wall above the desk, a portrait of justice, blindfolded and holding

her scales. The furniture was sleek, comfortable and nicely arranged. The rug was deep, mahogany in color and worth a lot of money.

The man behind the desk looked up. His eyes were pale and lifeless with the complete blank stare of the totally blind. There were numerous deeply etched scars around his eyes, marks of the acid which had been hurled into his face. He spoke in a pleasant voice and his lips parted in a welcoming smile.

"Hello, Commissioner. You've the honor of being my first visitor."

TONY QUINN arose and stretched out his hand. It wasn't pointed straight at Warner, but for the gesture of a blind man its aim was good.

The clerk at the door closed it softly and whistled.

"Hey, June, you should have seen that. Warner just walks across the rug hardly making a sound, and the boss knows him right away."

June Marlowe, the stenographer, just looked slightly superior.

"I could have told you that. You see, my father was a cop. He got killed about a year ago when he was chasing a bunch of crooks. As soon as Mr. Quinn went into business again, he looked me up, and here I am.

"I'd bust my right arm for him. What's so funny about his knowing the Police Commissioner? Blind people can hear better than those who have eyes. He just listened to Warner's footsteps and recognized them, that's all.

"Now sit down and pretend to work. We may have a client any time now. Mr. Quinn is pretty well known in this town, believe me."

Inside Quinn's office, Warner sat down.

"Tony," he said, "you can't imagine how good this makes me feel—to see you back in harness even if we're now on opposite sides of the fence. I suppose you'll be in court pounding away at my poor detectives and patrolmen from now on."

QUINN chuckled. "If I'm lucky enough to have any clients entrust themselves to a blind man."

"Nonsense," Warner answered. "They'll flock here as soon as the news spreads around. I wish you the very best of luck and victory in all your cases—almost all, anyway."

"Commissioner, you didn't come here just to wish me well. I'm blind as a bat, but that doesn't impair my other senses, You've been tapping the arms of your chair like a nervous kid waiting his turn in a dentist's chair. What's up?"

"Try and keep anything from you," said Warner. "Well Tony, you're right, I've retained a client for you. The craziest, wildest thing you've ever heard of. Perhaps I'll be cursed all over the place before this is done with, but I can't help feeling that the Voice of Justice is the voice of a sincere man."

"The Voice of Justice!" Quinn frowned. "Are you going melodramatic on me?"

"Hardly. Last night I must have been drugged—cleverly too, because I don't know when it happened. I awoke in a very comfortable bedroom.

"My clothes were neatly hung up and I was clad in silk pajamas, The moment I sat up, a voice, piped into the room somehow, told me to get dressed and not to worry. I obeyed. Then I was instructed to enter another room which I did. I found an excellent breakfast waiting for me. Don't ask me where I was. There were no windows and the room must have been soundproof or far out in the country where there was no noise."

"That's highly interesting," Quinn broke in. "How does it affect me? A client, you said."

"Exactly. That same voice spoke from a hidden amplifier. It was a man's voice asking for advice. He said I might call him the Voice of Justice, that he had dedicated his life to helping the police arrest criminals.

"At first I thought it was a hoax performed by the Black Bat. Now I'm sure it wasn't. At any rate the voice indicated that this mysterious personality needed an outside contact man—one he could trust absolutely.

"It wanted a man who wouldn't ask too many questions, wouldn't see too much and would obey the advice given him. This Voice of Justice swears he knows more criminals than any other person alive and wishes to turn them over to justice."

"What's his gag?" Quinn asked. "What's there in it for him?"

"Nothing—or at least he said so. I was in a funny spot, Tony. I had to make some answer, so I gave him your name. I told him you were blind, honest and would be cooperative if this thing was on the level.

"He thanked me, doped me again, and I awoke in my own car somewhere in Central Park. Now wait—I wasn't having a nightmare. This thing really happened and I thought I'd better warn you before the Voice of Justice contacted you."

"Well thanks," Quinn said. "If it's true, and not just the act of some smart alec, it sounds promising. I'll await with interest the Voice of Justice.

"All I hope is that we're not being led into something bigger than we can handle and that the Voice of Justice doesn't turn into the Voice of Injustice and make us a couple of dopes. You mentioned that you thought at first this might be a trick of the Black Bat. What made you change your mind?"

"Well, I made a quiet investigation of your whereabouts last night. Seems you spent the earlier part of the evening right here in your office and the rest of the night at home.

"Now I'm not accusing you of being the Black Bat. Captain McGrath would he a great deal less direct than I, Tony. However, the Black Bat does seem to get around and know what's going on.

"You'd make an excellent Black Bat. In fact, if there were no warrants out against the Black Bat, I'd sincerely hope you might be he. For one thing, his work is perfect and for another, it would mean that you were not blind."

THE inter-office communicating system buzzed. Quinn fumbled with the box as though he were unfamiliar with it. Finally, he snapped down the proper button and the clerk's voice spoke.

"A client, sir. Mr. and Mrs. James Drake."

"Send them in in two or three minutes." Quinn rubbed his hands. "Thanks, Winkie." He snapped off the system and looked somewhat to the left of where Warner sat.

"This doesn't sound much like the Voice of Justice calling, but clients are clients. You'll excuse me, Commissioner?"

Warner got up. "The bum's rush, eh? All right, Tony. I'm glad you're getting started so promptly. By the way—that law clerk of, yours—Winkie, I think you called him. Is he all right?"

"I hope so. He graduated from law school a few months ago, couldn't find a job and advertised for one. I hired him because I like his voice. What's he look like, Commissioner?"

"Like a dope. Exactly as you'd picture one. He's thin, almost scrawny. He wears big, black shell-rimmed glasses and looks like a second cousin to a bookworm.

"Impressionable too. He bowed to me as if I were four kinds of a dictator. You won't have to worry about him, Tony. I noticed the stenographer too—nice of you to take in Bill Marlowe's kid. She needed a job."

Warner walked out, and two people entered. Quinn's eyes were utterly blank. The best surgeons had pronounced the hopelessness of their ever seeing again, but Tony Quinn *could* see. In fact his eyesight ranged far beyond that of any average man. Now he critically examined his first clients although neither they nor anyone else would have thought so.

Tony Quinn saw a man of about forty, with mild blue eyes, and hair that was turning gray at the temples. His height was about an inch less than Tony Quinn's five feet ten, and he was slender, almost dapper. He wore expensive clothes very well indeed and carried himself like a man of affairs.

The woman might have been three or four years younger and, in comparison to her husband, was rather on the plain side although she was intelligent looking and neat.

"Please sit down," Quinn said. "I'd gladly help you to a chair, but I'm a little unfamiliar with the layout of my office. You see—I'm blind."

The woman gave a sudden intake of breath and whispered to the man at her side. "Do you think he's all right, Jimmy? There's so much at stake."

Tony Quinn heard this, for his hearing was exceptionally sharp. He didn't betray the fact however. The man gave a savage nod of his head, helped the woman into a chair and sat down himself.

"My name is James Drake, sir," he said. "This is my wife, Mary. I need an attorney urgently, someone to convince a judge or jury that a man isn't quite as bad as he may be painted. I'm going to confess a crime because I want to give myself up, yet I don't want to serve a long term in prison.

"I'm the vice president of the Thrift Trust Company. I've been there for several years. My weakness is the stock market. I stole two hundred thousand dollars to place on a sure thing. Like all other sure things this one folded up.

"I'm in a rather bad predicament, as you can see. I'm sure I could arrange the books so this discrepancy wouldn't be discovered for years, but there is such a thing as a conscience—and a wife who trusts in you."

Drake leaned closer to his wife and patted her hand gently. Then he went on.

"Fortunately, I'm not completely broke. I think, by selling everything I own, it's possible to make restitution, and that's what I wish you to handle, besides taking care of the criminal end of the case. I don't know how much of a fee I'll be able to pay you. It all depends on what is left."

"There will be no fee," Quinn said quietly. "Not in your case. Willingness to expose yourself and make restitution to the best of your ability should sway the mercy of any judge or jury. I might not be able to get you off scot-free, but I doubt there will be any stiff sentence. Are you ready to be arrested now?"

"I've been ready for weeks," Drake passed a hand across tired eyes. "I needed Mary's courage to help me do it. You see, if I kept on this way I'd probably steal much more, and when I was caught, it would be the end of me. You may call the police."

QUINN reached blindly for the phone, but before he had it off the cradle, the inter-office communicating system buzzed again. He flipped the button, and Winkie spoke.

"A big package just came for you, sir. Heavy thing, too. There was a note with it—says you must be sure to open it at once. Shall I bring it in?"

"Yes." Quinn frowned. He hadn't ordered anything.

Winkie staggered in, his eyes looking like those of an owl. He carried a brown paper package about two feet long, a foot thick and, perhaps, eighteen inches high. At a gesture from Quinn, Winkie stripped away the paper.

"Well, I'll be doggoned," he said. "It's a radio. A shortwave set and a honey, too. What'll I do with it? There's a tag tied to one of the dials. It says they aren't to be touched. Just plug the radio in, turn on the switch and wait. Looks like somebody's having fun with you, sir."

"Put it on my desk," Quinn said. "Do as the instructions indicate and then leave. I'll be busy until further notice."

There was a steady hum as Winkie sent current through the radio. Jimmy and Mary Drake looked at one another in a helpless manner. Jimmy gestured with the palms of his hands upraised in a silent, eloquent gesture. Then the radio crackled. A resonant voice came from it and all three persons in that room froze to attention.

"Mr. Tony Quinn. If things have turned out as I planned, you are now listening to me. Absorb every word carefully because I cannot repeat. Do not try to arrange for tracing the source of this broadcast. I'll be gone before such a thing could be done.

"When I contact you again, you will first receive instructions how to set the dials. Each time it will be over a different wavelength. I am the Voice of Justice, about whom Commissioner Warner must have told you.

"My mission is to make crime non-profitable. When I locate a crook who has pulled a financially successful job, I shall turn him and the loot over to you. Nothing petty will be handled, for the police are capable of taking care of minor crooks.

"If there is a reward involved, well and good. If there is none, it will be up to you to arrange that one shall be paid. No, I'm not seeking this reward for myself. It is to be brought by you, to a certain place I shall later designate.

"You will turn it over to a man—an inventor whose work will benefit the entire world. He will convince you that he is honest and does not know me. My powers are vast and I must not be challenged. To prove what I can do, let me tell you about the two people now present in your office, Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Drake.

"He has confessed, or is about to confess, to the crime of embezzlement. He may try to convince you this is his first slip, but ask him about the time in Chicago, when he systematically looted money entrusted to him when he was cashier of the Langsner Theatre Chain.

"Keep the radio and wait for my messages. Tonight, I shall speak again and tell you about a murderous crook, far out of Jimmy Drake's class. He is not a minor criminal but he does not resort to violence. Drake is not all bad. He deserves a break, but I don't care whether or not he gets it. *Au revoir,* Mr. Quinn."

The connection was cut off, and for a moment

only the steady hum of the radio filled the room. Then Mary Drake gave a gentle cry and collapsed on the floor.

CHAPTER III
The Voice Acts

ANTHONY Quinn fumbled with the radio until he located the switch and cut it off. Jimmy Drake was lifting his wife and trying to make her comfortable on a leather davenport set against the east wall of the office. Quinn's blank eyes stared straight ahead. His mind was turning over furiously.

Of all supremely mysterious things he'd seen or heard of this romped home a winner. The Voice of Justice came from nowhere, exposing criminals, demanding a reward and ordering it to be given to someone in need of it.

The whole thing had a false ring to it, but Quinn never underestimated the Voice of Justice. Not for one second. The way he'd kidnapped Warner, the method of communicating with his selected contact man and his knowledge of Jimmy Drake's past, all bespoke of the man's cleverness. How did he know that Drake and his wife were here anyhow?

Mary Drake recovered consciousness and clung to Jimmy. He soothed her for a moment, squared his shoulders and walked up to Quinn's desk.

"I don't know what kind of a trick that was, but I'm blowed if I like it. Yes—I did steal before. I ran away that time because I had no Mary to advise me, no wife to show me the difference between right and wrong. I'll confess to the Chicago job, too. In fact, I'm glad it's going to be all over with."

"Sit down," Quinn said. "This was no trick. It surprised me as much as it did you. Now remember this. I'm your lawyer. I think you deserve a break because you have proven it by coming here to surrender.

"If you will promise to get another job when this is over, save your money and pay back that theatre chain gradually, I shall not mention your first offense even though it violates my duties as an attorney to some extent. Forget you ever heard that broadcast.

"Now I'll get a man down here from headquarters. Leave the rest to me and by the way, how are you fixed for money? I'll gladly advance Mrs. Drake some."

Drake rubbed his eyes. "I came to the right lawyer, Mr. Quinn. You'll never know how much I'm grateful."

Twenty minutes later, Captain McGrath of the Headquarters Squad barged into the office with Winkie frantically hanging onto his coat tails. Quinn arose, apparently confused by the commotion, quite unable to see just exactly what was going on.

"Quinn," McGrath bawled, "will you tell this gnat to remove himself from my coat. I paid forty bucks for this suit."

"Oh—it's you, Captain. All right, Winkie, let him go and return to your desk. Thanks for trying to obey orders though about not admitting anyone. I forgot to warn you about Captain McGrath."

McGrath was chunky, but not fat. Those were muscles that bulged out his suit. He had a closely cropped mustache, a broad, determined looking face and an aggressive manner.

"Well," he asked, "what's the beef? You said something about having a prisoner for me to take back. There's something phony about this. You're a lawyer again and lawyers try to get crooks out of jail, not put them in."

Quinn calmly explained it all. McGrath sighed and motioned to Drake.

"Okay, pal, we'll go down and book you. Before the ink is dry, Quinn will have you sprung or I'm a tubful of maple syrup right out of a tree. Let's go."

MARY Drake, after they'd gone, came closer to the desk. "I'll never forget this, Mr. Quinn," she said. "You've been terribly kind. Jimmy isn't bad—not really. I never knew about that Chicago affair. Please do what you can for him."

"Immediately. As luck would have it, I know some of the directors of the Thrift Trust Company. I'm inclined to think that after I've talked to them, they will refuse to prosecute and Jimmy's going to jail for a short time won't hurt him. It may do some good, in fact.

"It will make him realize that the end of a crooked row is apt to be unpleasant. Leave me your address and then go home. He'll be with you by nightfall if I have to bail him out myself."

Quinn leaned back when he was alone again. He pursed his lips in a whistle of amazement. What did the Voice of Justice mean? Those exceptionally keen ears of his had detected a slight scratchy sound during the broadcast. Possibly the voice had been a recording. Then, after awhile, his thoughts reverted to Jimmy Drake, and he grinned pleasantly. Not very much profit in his first case, but plenty of satisfaction.

He also reflected that Captain McGrath had been more than polite in not voicing his suspicions that Tony Quinn wasn't blind and that he was the Black Bat. Those suspicions were more or less of a profound duty with McGrath.

He'd sworn to toss the Black Bat into a cell if it took a lifetime. Not that this worried Quinn even though he really was the Black Bat. McGrath's efforts spiced his double life of a blind man and a relentless pursuer of criminals.

For McGrath was, above all things, honest. If he finally did land the Black Bat, it would be done fairly. There had even been several truces between McGrath and the Black Bat, and the doughty police captain had abided by his promises each time.

Tony Quinn became the Black Bat in a rather astounding manner. Blinded by acid at the very peak of his career, he'd become a virtual recluse. Luckily he was rich so that he wanted for nothing, but even his money couldn't help him in that world of complete darkness.

He'd found that his other senses became increasingly sharp, but he possessed no idea that some day this would serve him well. Then a girl had come to him—Carol Baldwin—whose father had been shot by crooks while making his rounds as a police sergeant.

Dying, her father wished to donate his eyes to Tony Quinn so that Quinn might again combat crime. A surgeon in a little town had performed the operation. He died shortly afterwards as did Carol's father, so that there were very few who knew that the operation had been performed.

It was an astounding success. With the return of his sight, Quinn discovered that some kind fate had endeavored to make up for his long months of darkness. Quinn found that he could see as well in utter darkness as he could in light. Even colors were visible in apparent blackness to those strange eyes of his.

PREFERRING to be thought of as blind and helpless, Quinn had told no one of his recovery except the three persons who became his aides. One was, of course, Carol Baldwin for whom Quinn had developed a feeling of love and appreciation.

Then there was Silk Kirby, an ex-confidence man who had derived his nickname from the smooth way in which he functioned. Silk came to rob Tony Quinn one night, saved his life instead and remained to become his invaluable aide and servant.

Later, a huge giant of a man named Butch O'Leary proved he was worthy to be one of the Black Bat's trusted associates. Butch made up in brute strength what he lacked in brains, although Butch was never a fool.

Quinn thought of them and wondered what they'd say about this Voice of Justice and how they'd like to help track him down. It was going to be odd tracing a man who tried to help the law, but not for an instant did Tony Quinn decide to let the Voice operate with impunity. Until he was positive that no money or power making scheme lay behind the ambitions of the Voice, he'd go on trying to ferret him out.

For the next several hours he was very busy working to free Jimmy Drake. Those efforts were successful, and Jimmy, brought before a judge, was allowed to go free in Quinn's custody. He shook hands with Quinn after it was over, thanked him a dozen times and then hurried home to his wife.

Quinn returned to the office. Winkie and June Marlowe had left for the day and Quinn threw aside his mask of blindness for a few moments while he examined that shortwave radio. It was a standard make, probably fixed to receive certain wavelengths.

An expensive piece of scientific perfection, it indicated that the Voice was no cheapskate. He'd announced that another message would come through soon, and Quinn sat there wondering when it would start.

He heard someone in the outer office, picked up a cane and walked there, tapping a path before him. A messenger boy handed him an envelope, guided his hand to sign for it. Quinn handed him half a dollar.

"Would you mind reading this to me?" he asked. "I'm alone here and—I'm blind."

The boy ripped open the flap, extracted a plain white card and read the few words typed on it.

"Funny message," he said. "It says 'Between five and seven o'clock. First dial thirty-one, second dial sixty-four, third dial twenty-nine.'

"Hey mister—are you a G-Man and is this a code message? It came to the office kinda funny. We were busy, see, and when the crowd cleared out, this envelope was lying on the counter with a buck clipped to it and an order to deliver it here."

"No G-Man," Quinn smiled. "Just a little business arrangement. Thank you very much."

Quinn locked the office door this time and hurried back to the radio. He carefully set the dials, sat down and lit a cigarette. It was five forty-three when the monotonous hum of the radio was broken. That same resonant voice spoke to him.

"Mr. Tony Quinn. This is the Voice of Justice again. You handled the affair of Jimmy Drake very well indeed. It proves your capabilities, and I am most grateful to Commissioner Warner for recommending you.

"Now listen carefully again because I can never repeat myself. There is a certain vicious character named Junky Malone. He got his questionable title because he used to take dope. They broke him of that in prison, but they didn't break his criminal tendencies.

"Six months ago he staged the robbery at the Allied Machine Company's plant. He got away with a payroll and a large sum represented by certain bonds which happened to be in the place.

"Those bonds are still intact because Junky doesn't know much about finances and thinks they might be traced to him as they very well might be. He is hiding in an old shack at the foot of Carmody Street. You can't miss it.

"Capture him—with the aid of the police. There is a five thousand dollar reward on his head. You will collect that and hold it, in cash, until you hear from me again. That is all."

Quinn switched off the radio.

"That," he said solemnly, "is what you think. It won't be all until I know who you are and what you're getting out of this."

He reached for the phone and got Captain McGrath. He rapidly sketched what had happened and asked McGrath to get a squad and meet him at once.

CHAPTER IV
The Black Bat's Doubt

THE two police cars disgorged seven men armed with machine guns. Quinn and McGrath were in the first car. They found Junky Malone's shack easily, and the detectives carefully surrounded it. McGrath looked at Quinn.

"You'd better stay here. If this business isn't the biggest hoax I ever heard of, we might run into a curtain of hot lead. Junky killed a man during that stickup, and he's very apt to shoot it out. You can't see and even if you could, slugs are tough babies to duck. See you in a few minutes."

Drawing his service pistol, McGrath approached the shack. It was dark, and McGrath was highly skeptical. He waved his gun in a signal for attack, and the detectives closed in. There was no fusillade of death, no angry shouts of a trapped man. McGrath finally tried the door. It was locked.

HE drew keys from his pocket, tried to fit one into the lock, but when it didn't slide in, he turned a flashlight on the door. Then McGrath gave a grunt. The keyhole was plugged up with bits of newspaper. The crack beneath the door was similarly wadded.

"Bust her down," McGrath ordered. "And make it snappy. I just got the smell of gas."

The door crashed in and plenty of illuminating gas came pouring out. There was a man seated in a corner next to a two burner gas stove. A rubber hose was hooked to the gas pipe, and the man held the other end in his hands.

He had been dead for two or three hours. Strewn all over the floor were gold-edged documents. The stolen bonds which Junky had been too afraid to cash.

McGrath heard the tap of Quinn's cane and hurried out to help him over the door.

"Junky was here all right," he said. "You got a good tip only Junky is dead. He took the gas route out, which is just as well for him and for the state too.

"The bonds were thrown all over the place. I imagine Junky spent all the cash on women, booze and the ponies. Then, with fifty grand in bonds which he couldn't spend, he went nuts thinking of the spot he was in.

"I'm telling you, Quinn, this Voice of Justice knows what he's talking about. I say, this wouldn't be the Black Bat operating under a nom de plume, would it?"

Quinn smiled.

"Hardly, Captain. I don't know the Black Bat, but I do think his reputation is such that there would be no reason for him to work under another name!"

"Yeah," McGrath said. "Yeah, that's right and if anybody should know it's you. Someday I'm going to prove you're the Black Bat. Oh, I know I've said it often enough and sometimes I get confused when things make it seem you can't be the Black Bat but just the same—"

"Leave it unsaid," Quinn chuckled. "I know that speech by heart. Well, I guess this takes care of Junky and the Voice's first tip. Will you have somebody drive me home?"

McGrath did that himself, leaving a sergeant to clean up the details. Silk Kirby, slender, bald and immaculate in the quiet livery of a butler, opened the door, grimaced at McGrath who had helped the erstwhile blind man up the steps and led Quinn inside.

"What happened?" he asked eagerly. "What's this Voice of Justice business?"

Quinn stared at him.

"Now how in the world did you know anything about that?"

"The radio is full of it. So are the newspapers. Seems the publicity boys were tipped off. I've been chewing my nails for the last couple of hours. So have Butch and Carol. They're in the lab."

Quinn's lips tightened.

"So the Voice of Justice likes to read about his little campaign, eh? Suppose you serve dinner in the lab, Silk, if there is enough of it. We'll talk things over there. Be sure to lock the doors and pull down the shades in the study."

WHEN Silk finished obeying these latter orders, Quinn slowly tapped his way into the study. Once there and secure from any possibility of prying eyes, he threw off his mask of blindness, stepped up to a section of the wall and touched a hidden control.

A panel slid silently back, and he walked into a spacious laboratory where every instrument used in the detection of crime, was kept ready for instant use. Carol was there, bright and eager in her blonde loveliness. She linked an arm beneath Quinn's and smiled happily up at him. He patted her hand, glad

to feel her close and know that she cared for him as much as he did for her.

Butch stood awkwardly in a corner, fumbling with his hat. His head reached to within a few inches of the ceiling. His bulk filled the whole end of the lab. His shoulders were unbelievably broad, and he had hands that looked as though he constantly wore boxing gloves. Those hands could maim and kill if necessary, but a kinder man than Butch hardly existed.

"Hi, boss," he grinned widely. "Got yourself mixed up in something pretty big this time. What are you gonna do about it?"

"Yes, Tony," Carol sat down beside him. "What? Who is this Voice of Justice, and is he really on the side of the law?"

Quinn didn't reply just then for Silk entered carrying two trays of food. He disappeared and came back with still another, heaped high with enough food for a small army.

"Here's your snack," he told Butch somewhat disdainfully. "When you show up for dinner, the grocer and the butcher tuck a neat little sum in their cash registers."

"Never mind, Butch," Quinn laughed. "You're worth that and more to me. Now to spoil our digestion let's talk about murder."

"Murder?" Carol gasped and the others stopped eating very abruptly. "Has someone been killed?"

Quinn buttered a biscuit and carved himself a chunk of steak.

"I think so. The Voice of Justice tipped me to the whereabouts of Junky Malone, who was hiding out as a result of a holdup job. In that stickup fifty thousand in bonds were swiped—nice negotiable bonds which any ordinary crook would have tried to sell.

"Of course they were hot, because the numbers were listed, but a fence might take a chance if he could buy them for about ten percent on the dollar. I know about Junky. He was a fool. Perfectly capable of staging that stickup, yes, but not the type who'd be willing to let fifty grand in bonds rot on his hands when he might get some cash for them."

"But you said murder," Carol broke in.

Quinn nodded and dropped two sugar cubes into his coffee. He stirred it vigorously as he spoke.

"That's right, I did. Junky was found dead. Apparently, he committed suicide by inhaling illuminating gas, but I think he didn't kill himself, which adds up to murder, doesn't it?

"My belief is that Junky was restrained while the gas was administered to him. Then he was propped in a corner, left holding the rubber tube through which the gas still flowed, and the murderers proceeded to stuff the window, the keyhole and the door with newspapers.

"I noticed something that slipped by McGrath. The newspapers under the door had been jammed there from outside the shack, No pieces protruded on the outside and plenty did on the inside."

"What are you gonna do about it?" Butch asked.

"I think," Quinn said, "that the Black Bat is going to forage around. Thanks to the fact that the Voice of Justice wished all this publicity on himself, I can go out as the Black Bat. Otherwise I'd have been forced to hold myself in check because the Voice would have then guessed that Tony Quinn and the Black Bat are synonymous.

"First of all, I'll investigate the shack where Junky met his death. There is one other clue. a weak one, but it might develop. A fellow named Drake came to the office today and gave himself up to me as a confessed embezzler. While he was there, the Voice spoke to me for the first time and told me all about Drake and his trouble.

"In fact he went even further than Drake dared to by telling of another offense Drake had pulled some time ago. Such knowledge could only have come from someone associated with Drake, so I want him investigated.

"I want to know his friends, his enemies, where he eats, whom he sees, if his home life is as agreeable as he and Mrs. Drake seem to make it. That will be your job, Carol. You and Butch handle that while Silk and I look over the scene of a suicide which may be murder. Any questions?"

"Yeah," Butch grinned. "What's for dessert?"

CHAPTER V
Weird Rendezvous

IT would have been impossible to recognize Silk an hour later. During his career as a confidence man, Silk had fashioned disguises for himself. They came in handy when he didn't want to leave town after skinning some sucker with more larceny in his soul than Silk possessed.

Now, in his association with the Black Bat, they were even more useful. Silk looked like a country bumpkin, but not too much so. There was nothing exaggerated by the disguise, but its cleverness gave the exact impression Silk wanted to give.

Carol and Butch had left minutes before to tackle the problem of Mr. and Mrs. Drake. Tony Quinn donned sheer, light clothing over his business suit. A black shirt and tie, black socks and black crepe soles finished his dressing except for a hood that went over his head, right down to his shoulders.

It was a strange cloak that was ribbed until it looked like the wings of a bird and buckled around his shoulders.

He put the cloak and hood on just for experimental purposes while in the lab. These were removed, rolled up and tucked away in a specially created pocket of his suit. He put a wide-brimmed black hat on his head, pulled the brim far down to hide the telltale scars around his eyes and signaled Silk that he was ready.

Silk opened a trapdoor, descended a short ladder and entered a tunnel. This led to a garden house well behind the main dwelling, on the rim of Tony Quinn's spacious estate. Silk slipped to the nearby gate, looked up and down for a moment and then walked casually north until he came to a coupé parked at the curb.

It was a popular-priced model on the surface, but several times the original cost of the car had been placed beneath the modest hood. A motor that would drive it over a hundred miles an hour purred smoothly under Silk's foot. The rest of the car had been weighted down so cleverly that not a sign of this work could be seen from outside.

Silk drove it toward the gate. A fleeting shadow glided out of the darkness and popped into the car beside Silk. In silence they drove to the vicinity of Junky's shack. The Black Bat got out, disappeared down an alley and kept following back yards until he reached the shack. Through this intense darkness, the Black Bat moved quietly and with sure steps. Impediments which might have tripped any average person, were brought into bold relief by his uncanny eyesight.

Then the Black Bat came to a sudden halt. There was no shack! Where it had stood were only pieces of debris and burned uprights. Sections of wall, uncharred, were twenty feet from the site of the shack.

"An explosion did that," the Black Bat muttered, "followed later by fire. Now I'm sure Junky was murdered and the place blasted and burned to remove any possibility of clues remaining. First clue is dead end which means, unless Carol and Butch hit onto something, I must wait until the Voice of Justice moves again. That may be soon."

The Black Bat returned to the car and joined Silk.

"Drive back to the house," he ordered. "Junky's shack was blasted to bits. Hurry, Silk. the Voice may give me instructions over the radio about the reward money at any moment, and I don't want to miss it."

But there was no message when they returned. Silk removed his disguise quickly. and Tony Quinn doffed his regalia. It was only a few minutes after eight o'clock, but Quinn was worried. He sat in his accustomed chair before the fireplace in his study. Pipe in hand, cane between his knees, he stared straight ahead with the vacant expression of a totally blind man. Silk busied himself about the house.

TONY QUINN asked himself, what the Voice was after? Had Junky been killed and the holdup framed on him to protect the real killer? Perhaps the Voice was handing solutions of murder and holdups on a silver platter to the police, framing the jobs on stooges so the actual instigators went free, with a considerable load off their minds.

Such deeds might prove profitable for the Voice, but there would have to be a great number of them, and the Voice would have to be the greatest crime investigator in the world to contact the real criminals and get them to admit their guilt.

The doorbell buzzed. Quinn knew someone was coming long before that. His sensitive ears detected the footsteps of a stranger. It proved to be another messenger boy with a wire. Silk brought it to Quinn. The message was from the Voice of Justice and as terse as his first one.

> NINE O'CLOCK TO TEN, FIRST DIAL NINETY. SECOND DIAL FORTY-SEVEN. THIRD DIAL EIGHT.

"Get the big car out of the garage, Silk," Quinn ordered. "You and I are going to my office to receive certain instructions from our newfound friend or enemy. Hurry. We haven't too much time. And Silk—better take along a pair of guns. We might not have an opportunity to return here for them."

Silk drove the car straight to the big office building where Quinn had his suite. With Silk leading, Quinn stepped into the elevator and was whisked to his floor. Silk opened the door, locked it after they passed through, and Quinn used his cane to help him reach the desk. He picked up a pencil and scribbled something on a pad. It was a note which Silk read without apparently doing so.

> "Must be very careful. Might be someone watching with glasses. There might be a mike hidden around. Never forget that I'm blind."

Quinn took the telegram from his pocket. handed it to Silk.

"Dial the radio according to those numbers," he said. "I'll have to ask you to wait in the other room. I don't believe the Voice would like it if you heard his instructions."

Silk moved the dials. bowed slightly like a well-trained servant and then withdrew. Quinn lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair to wait. He didn't have long. The Voice came, speaking slowly so that Quinn wouldn't miss a word.

"You did very well in connection with Junky Malone. The reward is probably now prepared. Get it and have your servant drive you out of the city. Reach Route 14 and follow it for precisely seventeen and one-quarter miles after you hit that highway.

"You will then see a side road. Have your driver

turn down that and proceed for six-tenths of a mile exactly. You will get out there and wait.

"The man to whom you are to deliver the money is an inventor. He is at work on something that may help the defense of this country to a remarkable extent.

"That is why I have selected him as the recipient of the first several rewards that are bound to come. Later there will be someone else, equally as deserving. Be sure that your servant drives your car away and doesn't return for exactly one hour. That is all."

Quinn shut off the set, reached for the phone and got Captain McGrath. To his query McGrath answered.

"Yeah. The Allied Machine Company directors held a special meeting early this afternoon. They cut all red tape. The five thousand dollars is down at Headquarters now. My orders are to turn it over to you, so any time—"

"I'll meet you in front of Headquarters in ten minutes," Quinn said. "Have the money."

He called Silk back, had him give the usual assistance a blind man needs and soon they were driving toward Headquarters. Captain McGrath was standing on the steps and immediately got into the car.

"Why drag me out here?" he asked. "Isn't my office good enough?"

"Of course it is, Captain, but my orders are to work with strict secrecy. I'll take the money now. Good fellow. Thanks.

"About the Junky Malone business—did you examine the shack for any clues afterwards? Junky might have had pals in the deal, you know."

"Examine it?" McGrath grunted. "There isn't enough left to make a good toothpick out of. Seems one of those dumb cops I left on guard forgot to shut off the gas. Or it still continued to leak out somewhere.

"Anyway about an hour after Junky's body had been removed, the shack blew up. I don't know what caused the spark, but she sure is blasted to bits."

"Oh," Quinn said softly. "Well, anyhow, thanks again. I've got to deliver this money at once and don't ask me where. I can't break the confidences of the Voice."

SILK pulled away from the curb and left McGrath scratching the back of his neck and wondering if the Black Bat was so broke that five thousand dollars might interest him.

Tony Quinn, whom McGrath was certain was the Black Bat, could have staged all this just to get his hands on the money. Then McGrath made a wry face. The Black Bat had often found opportunities to get far more than five thousand dollars and always passed them up.

Silk followed Quinn's orders, heading first to the city line and then following the designated route. They passed through Dobbs Ferry, Irvington and finally, as they put the outskirts of Tarrytown behind them, the speedometer indicated they were nearing the proper spot. Silk saw the side road, turned down it and stopped when the meter indicated they'd covered exactly six-tenths of a mile. He helped Quinn get out.

"Funny spot for a meeting place," he grumbled. "I don't think you ought to go through with it, sir. This is desolate country right here. Darker than pitch and I can't see a sign of a house."

"I'll follow my instructions," Quinn answered quietly. "You may drive away now, Silk and return in precisely one hour. Please go."

Silk got back into the car, turned around and disappeared. Five minutes after the taillight passed out of sight, a powerful beam of light centered directly on Quinn. It took all his efforts to keep from blinking those dead-looking eyes.

"A car is coming for you," a voice said gently. Not the tones of the Voice of Justice, but less firm, like those of an older man highly excited.

"Please get in. I know that you are blind, and because I can see you through powerful glasses, I shall instruct you just how to proceed."

Two minutes later, Quinn saw a car rolling down the road. It made no sound whatsoever except for the grinding of tires against the rutted, dirt lane. It was the strangest looking car Quinn had seen in years, one of those old fashioned electrically propelled buggies that passed out of existence years ago. Only this was different to a certain extent. There seemed to be no windows in it and no windshield.

Quinn cocked his head as though he heard the approach of the vehicle, but he didn't look in its direction. Above all, he must keep up the illusion of his blindness for the Voice might get over-confident and agree to meet his contact man face-to-face, banking on the fact that he was blind. Quinn hoped for that moment.

The strange car stopped four or five feet from where Quinn stood. For a second he thought the thing would run him down. The nervous voice came from a speaker hidden in a tree just above him.

"Turn to the left. Now walk until I tell you to stop. That's fine. Now reach out and you will discover door handles. Open the door and get inside. No one will be there. The car will automatically drive you to your destination.

"It is radio propelled. Yes—you're doing it exactly right. Raise your foot a trifle more. I don't want such a valuable man hurt, you know. Good. Just close the door now and sit quietly until I help you out."

CHAPTER VI
Pierlot's Secret

IT was the strangest ride Tony Quinn had ever experienced. It was like riding on the inside of a metal box with no possibility of seeing where he was going. Radio impulses took command of the vehicle, but it proceeded at about a fives mile an hour clip so that perhaps twenty minutes were consumed in the ride.

Then it stopped so abruptly that Quinn was half thrown out of the seat. He heard a big door slide shut. Then the door of the car was yanked open. Quinn just sat there, staring blankly ahead although he studied the man who stood beside the car with a hand ready to help him alight.

The man was short, almost dapper, but it might have been the goatee, carefully trimmed and black as coal which gave this impression. Certainly it wasn't the pair of rundown shoes nor the tousled hair nor the stained, mended laboratory gown which the man wore.

"You have arrived," this man said with a laugh. "It is too bad you are blind, Mr. Quinn. A ride in my little carriage is quite something to behold. Please get out now. My arm is waiting to assist you. We shall go into the house."

Quinn took the proffered arm, climbed down and walked beside the strange little man. They left what seemed to be a spacious garage, climbed a ramp which the inventor illuminated with a small electric torch and finally entered a big house. All around it were tall, thickly branched trees so that the place must be completely hidden from any inquisitive eyes.

It was furnished in modest style and reeked of the smell of chemicals. Quinn sat down in a chair which his host pushed under him. Gripping his cane, he stared straight ahead.

"This is all very odd," he said in a voice near the whining point. "I can't say I like it very much, but then—one can't say that the Voice of Justice operates in a usual manner. You are the man I am supposed to see, of course?"

"*Oui*—but yes. My name is Pierre Pierlot and I have been in this country many, many years. I am an inventor, and since 1923 I have worked, slaved and exhausted my money on something which will revolutionize this or any other war.

"I sought a well-hidden place to work because I am constantly in fear of spies or people who might like to snatch away my dream and profit by it. Also I am a very sick man. I cannot go abroad much. My heart is very weak. You have the money?"

Quinn removed the sheaf of bills from an inner pocket and thrust it in the general direction of Pierlot's voice. The inventor took it, rubbed the bills between his hands and sighed in ecstasy.

"Good! Very, very good. I can now continue my experiments. You are interested in how I knew you had arrived? The lane is never used except by those who come to see me, and they are few. I trust no one.

"The road is equipped with warning signals that flash on in my laboratory. Where you get out, I have a searchlight trained and I can see you with the aid of glasses from this house. However, even if you could see, you would never find this place again after you leave here.

"I received a radio not long ago like the one he sent you. My instructions came over it. But I am worried a little. This Voice seems to know all my tricks. He must be a very brilliant person to handle things as he does, but if he meant me or my work any harm, certainly he would not furnish me with money."

"That's right," Quinn answered. "I suppose I'll be coming here quite often if the plans of the Voice carry through. I'm rather pleased to be selected for this work. Mr. Pierlot. I feel as though I'm doing something to help justice. I'll go now if you don't mind."

Quinn was piloted down the ramp and into the garage. His blank appearing eyes studied the location and memorized it as well as he could. On the way back he determined to open the car door a trifle and trace the route. Pierlot spiked that.

"This is a very clever piece of work—my little car," he said. "It enables me to bring people here—those I trust—and yet they cannot find out where I am. Not unless they scour the countryside, and I would know that instantly because of the various alarm signals I have installed. When you enter my car, the doors are sealed electrically, and radio drives the car where I want it."

QUINN backed up against the car. As Pierlot spoke, Quinn managed to get a knife out of his pocket. Now, as he talked to Pierlot, complimenting him on his work, he carved a cross into the right rear tire. Not very deep, but effective enough to leave a tell-tale track in the road. The narrow, old-fashioned smooth type tire cut easily.

Then he got into the car. The door closed, and the strange contraption backed itself out of the garage, turned completely around half a dozen times to confuse the passenger, then proceeded on.

Five minutes later, Tony Quinn stood on the spot where this eerie adventure had begun. The electric car drove itself away and vanished around a bend in the lane. Promptly, Silk drove Quinn's limousine up, got out and helped Quinn into the car. That brilliant spotlight still brought the whole proceedings into relief.

"Turn around and head for the road," Quinn said in a whisper. "Don't ask questions. There may be sensitive mikes to pick up our conversation. I'm getting out. You continue and wait for me a mile down the road.

"Hand me one of those guns as I step in. This inventor may or may not be an innocent pawn in the Voice's game and I mean to find out just where he stands."

Silk dropped a gun on the seat with as much stealth as he might have exhibited if a crowd was around the car. As soon as he started to turn, the light beam winked out. Quinn hastily opened a hidden compartment in the car, extracted the regalia he used as the Black Bat and quickly put it on. Then he opened the door of the car and with a word of warning to Silk, jumped out.

He was invisible in this darkness for every inch of his clothing matched the gloom. Keeping well off the lane to avoid Pierlot's vaunted alarms, he passed by the spot where that electric car had dropped him. Cautiously he moved back toward the road. Without the use of any light whatsoever, he knelt and studied the tire marks in the road.

He spotted the tiny mounds in the shape of a cross, the pattern of which he'd cut out of one tire. Following this trail was easy to a certain extent. The trail continued along the lane for perhaps three quarters of a mile, and while the tire marks continued on, there were no further signs of that giveaway cross.

The Black Bat sensed Pierlot's trick. The electric car had been driven up and down the road many times, leaving its tracks so that if anyone tried to trace them, he'd be led well beyond the spot where they actually turned off.

On hands and knees, moving inch by inch, the Black Bat examined the side of the road. Then he grunted in silent admiration for Pierlot's genius. Real grass had been replaced with artificial grass attached to a plate which matched the coloring of the sod. This false grass was of a peculiar consistency so that it sprang erect again even after the car had passed across it. Absolutely no marks were left.

Ten yards beyond the edge of the lane, the Black Bat found the tracks again. Now the trail was easy to follow, for the tires had rolled over grass, flattening it and leaving a clear trail. His abnormal eyes followed the trail until he knew he must be very close to the house.

Parting very thick brush, he spotted the place, outlined vaguely against its background of tall trees. Not a light showed.

Evidently, the windows were blacked out as completely as the windshield in that electric car.

Not knowing what kind of a reception he'd get, the Black Bat drew his gun, eased off the safety and stole forward. He kept away from the ramp over which he'd traveled before and reached the rear of the house. Admission to the place seemed practically impossible.

The windows were sealed up with steel shutters. They must have been bolted from inside, and even though the Black Bat could open locks with a skill that rivaled a crackman burglar, he could in no way influence bolts. Yet he sensed that Pierlot's sleeping quarters must have a window that opened, and he looked for it. It was set high, a dormer window in one of the gables, but he could see the faint reflection of stars on the glass.

THE Black Bat swarmed up a nearby tree, climbed over a thick branch and managed to get within easy jump of that gabled roof. He landed softly as a cat, balanced on the edge, and quietly went to work on the window which was within easy reach.

It required five minutes to get it open because the Black Bat operated very carefully. Pierlot, with all his precautions, showed he was highly nervous and might use a gun before he knew the identity of his target.

The Black Bat slipped across the bedroom floor, opened a door and looked down a long corridor. He reached the stairway to the bottom floor and there was still no sign of Pierlot.

The Black Bat reasoned that the inventor must be at work in his lab. That would be on the north side of the house so he proceeded in that direction after negotiating the steps without creating any alarm.

He saw a door, ajar about half an inch and light streamed through it—the only light inside this grim house. Reaching this he paused to listen intently. Nothing! He gave the door a gentle push, peered through it and then dropped all pretense of stealth.

Pierre Pierlot was seated behind a ramshackle old desk, highly out of place in the long, narrow laboratory fitted with all modern apparatus. The desk must have been fifty or sixty years old. Pierlot looked like a bearded little gnome behind it. His eyes were riveted on the door, his hands rested on top of the desk.

"Come in," he said in a tense voice that seemed strangely muffled. "I have known of your presence for some time. You can't get out of here unless I allow you, and you cannot harm me so why should I be afraid?"

Yet his voice indicated that he was afraid, greatly so. The Black Bat stepped in full view of the man and Pierlot started up in a gesture of wild terror.

"Before you attempt any of your scientific tricks," the Black Bat warned, "hear me out. I didn't come to harm you nor to steal any of your inventions. I came only for information. If you don't recognize

this costume of mine, I might say that I'm the Black Bat."

"How—how did you find me? Who told you where I lived and worked? How did you get in? Answer me or by heaven I'll—"

"You won't do much," the Black Bat snapped and his gun arose to cover the goateed inventor. "Just sit down again and take it easy. I said I only wanted to help you. How did I get here? By following a blind man—one of the easiest tasks possible.

"I've learned something about the Voice of Justice, and it's my desire to get proof that he really means to help the authorities and not line his own pockets. He is helping you, and part of my answer should come from your own lips. Don't move—I'm coming closer."

PIERLOT began to laugh, stridently, but with more confidence. The Black Bat kept his gun ready not knowing whether or not to trust this man. Pierlot seemed to be laughing mostly at the gun.

The Black Bat advanced slowly, aware of the possibility of pitfalls but he wasn't prepared with what he finally did meet. A dozen yards from where the inventor sat, an invisible force stopped the Black Bat cold. It seemed that he had walked up against a steel barrier, created of substance from the fourth dimension.

He could feel it, cold and hard as metal, but his eyes saw no substance. He banged his fist against the invisible barrier, and Pierlot laughed louder. The Black Bat stepped back.

Pierlot howled in glee and renewed confidence.

"The first test—the first real test. You will put your gun down on that bench and advance. I shall permit you to pass through my invisible barrier because I trust you. I have heard of the Black Bat many times and I have nothing to hide.

"But the gun I will not permit. And don't threaten me with it. You could shoot a .50 calibre machine bullet and it wouldn't reach me!"

The Black Bat placed his gun on the bench as instructed. He advanced again and this time nothing stopped him. He felt no barrier whatsoever. Than he noticed that Pierlot had a small switch panel on the side of his desk.

"Sit down," Pierlot said and laughed some more. The scientist's voice was no longer muffled. "Has it occurred to you that I have the Black Bat at my mercy? Oh yes, you could kill me easily enough, but you couldn't get out of this room unless I willed it. What do you think of my invisible wall?"

"Let's understand one another." The Black Bat accepted a chair. "I'm only interested in getting information from you about the Voice of Justice, from whose activities you seem to be profiting. I saw Tony Quinn receive the money from a detective.

"I followed him out here. I know all about your radio-controlled electric automobile. The invisible wall is beyond me, I'll admit, but, first, about the Voice. Do you know who he is?"

"I do not—except that he must be a very kind patron of science. Isn't it fitting that reward money should be put to a useful purpose? Take me, for instance, and my invisible glass. You must admit it's good, but it's not good enough.

"I simply lowered a curtain of it to stop you, raised it to allow you passage. The glass is three inches thick and can stop the heaviest machine gun bullet at one hundred yards. The bullet shatters, sometimes powders the glass all around the point of impact, but its force is lost through the energy dissipated by friction.

"That glass is already on the market, but it is not as invisible as mine, though mine may be a trifle weaker. I'm trying to perfect an invisible glass which could stop a heavy shell and I'll do it—given enough money and time. The Voice seems to be providing the money and in a highly legal manner too. You don't think he's a crook, do you?"

"How could he be?" the Black Bat countered and soothed Pierlot at the same time. "Crooks don't give away five thousand dollars. This glass of yours would find highly useful purposes today in manufacturing new types of offensive and defensive machinery. Don't you keep the nature of your work a strict secret?"

"I do. No man other than you knows of it, which shows how much I trust the Black Bat. I know you must be he because no one else could have gained admittance or even found me.

"I'm afraid of enemy spies—of unscrupulous manufacturers who might try to learn my secret and, by putting their scientists to work, perfect the substance before I could. That is why I undertake all these protections."

"Then," the Black Bat asked pointedly, "how does it happen that the Voice of Justice knows about your work?"

"He doesn't," Pierlot protected. "A radio was delivered at the railroad express office, and I received a notice to go get it. I did. There were certain instructions accompanying the set and I obeyed them.

"The Voice of Justice spoke to me, outlining his plans, indicating that he knew I was doing some kind of work important to the future welfare of this nation, but he didn't admit that he knew just what it was. He wanted to help me and outlined his plans to do so. That is all I know. I swear it."

The Black Bat's hooded head moved up and down slowly. "Yes, I believe you, Pierlot, and you've told me all I came to find out. Whoever this Voice of Justice may be, he has displayed no dishonesty.

The profits from his work, which he hands you, are legally obtained. I don't think his actions call for any interference on my part."

"Heaven forbid." Pierlot threw up both hands. "Would you rob me of the only source of income I now have? If I took my work to a financier, he'd rob me of it. That has happened to me before. I trust no one.

"Before I am finished, there will be perfected a purely invisible glass so dense and of such quality that machine parts may be made of it. Then you will really know what an invisible aeroplane is like.

"I am well on the road to complete success. A few more weeks, even days, if my luck holds out, and I shall exhibit my work to the proper authorities who will use it, but keep its composition a secret.

"You are ready to go. The way is open, and I am very happy you called on me. If I can help you again, I shall be glad to serve you. I see no way to keep you out anyway. Not after the manner in which you reached me tonight."

The Black Bat offered his gloved hand and Pierlot took it in a firm grasp. Walking away, the Black Bat was suddenly banged against the invisible partition again and Pierlot howled in glee.

"I merely wished to see if it would fool you again. It did. I'm proud of my work. Now—I have raised the curtain."

As the Black Bat made his way out of the house through easier channels than his entrance, he didn't blame Pierlot for being proud. The man had reason to be, but—his work betrayed his exceptional cleverness and genius.

Was he also using this to garner an income for himself, one which he'd be under no obligation to anyone for? Was he the Voice of Justice? He was thinking in those lines when he reached the highway and Silk picked him up.

CHAPTER VII
Tomb for the Living

CAROL and Butch separated when they reached the neighborhood of Jimmy Drake's home. Butch went to check on Drake's activities through drug stores, cigar shops and a pool hall not far from where he lived.

Carol studied the house and managed to approach it closely without giving away her presence. Drake and his wife were in the small, neat little parlor. It was provided with cheap furniture, but looked comfortable. Drake had a pair of red leather scuffs on and was slumped lazily in a chair reading the newspaper. Mrs. Drake was mending what seemed to be one of her husband's shirts.

To Carol this picture was one of ideal domestic simplicity. If these two people were criminals, they were acting every second and this was almost too genuine to be even clever acting.

She had armed herself with a large ledger. Putting on a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles, with plain glass for the lenses, she rang the door bell of the house across the street. She identified herself as being employed by the school board, checking on children eligible for next season's term. Casually she indicated the house where the Drakes lived.

"Oh no," Carol's informant said, "the Drakes have no children. Awfully nice people though. They've lived there only a short time. They sold their big house. Mr. Drake is in trouble—he actually stole money from the place where he works, but I understand he has a clever lawyer who will get him out of it."

Carol mentally agreed with the clever lawyer part of it, thanked the woman and departed. She met Butch three blocks away.

"This Drake is a funny guy," Butch reported. "First of all, I find out he smokes fifty cent cigars and plenty of 'em too. He hangs around the poolroom—regular shark who will take anybody on for a decent bet. The barrooms never heard of him. A couple of grocery stores in the neighborhood were open, and they knew Drake's wife. She must be a pretty nice sort of a dame the way they speak about her. You find anything?"

"Only things which substantiate what you learned, Butch. On the surface the Drakes seem to be quiet people. Drake himself may have stolen money because he had high-priced tastes, as the expensive cigars indicate. I think we're finished here. Let's find the car and go back."

They had to walk directly in front of Drake's home to reach the spot where the car was parked. Just after they passed the house, a sedan pulled up to the curb. Butch took a quick look around.

"Keep walking," he warned. "That buggy is parked so a street light shines right through the windows. There are four mugs inside—and I mean mugs. They're waiting until we get out of sight. Something is gonna bust wide open. Take the next corner."

After they were out of sight of the house and the newly arrived car, Butch spoke tersely.

"You watch the front. I'm cutting through a couple of yards and if them bums try anything, I'll get myself a little action. Watch out for the rats."

Butch stepped over a hedge that most men would have been forced to make in a running leap. Not equipped with the Black Bat's superlative eyesight, Butch had to proceed more slowly and twice he got tangled up in clothes lines strung across back yards. Therefore, he was a trifle late when he finally did reach Drake's property, and his reception came in the form of gun blasts.

BUTCH ducked rapidly until he realized the shots came from inside the house. Then he advanced at a run, crouched and was ready for action. He heard a woman scream. Another gun banged and the scream was abruptly cut off.

A man, blurred by the darkness, came out of the back door, and there was a gun in his hand. Butch didn't require any further invitation to join the fight.

He ran lightly to the shelter of the thick trunk of an apple tree, tried to hide behind it and succeeded only because of the darkness. His body was considerably rounder than the tree trunk.

As the gunman approached, Butch gave a leap. It was amazing how fast his huge frame could move. The gunman heard him coming, whirled and tried to bring his gun to bear. Butch used the edge of one mighty hand to knock the weapon from the man's grasp. He made a pass at the crook's chin and missed. The gunman let out a wild yowl of terror. Then Butch had him.

Gripping the man by the nape of his neck, Butch flattened his nose with one blow and the gunman hung limp in his grasp. He picked the man up bodily. A branch of that apple tree had been broken off some time before and its jagged tip protruded invitingly. Butch merely hung his unconscious prisoner on it. Then he headed for the house.

The back door was wide open as he barged in. Seizing a fairly hefty kitchen chair, he moved toward the living room. He was too late. The gunmen had left, but there was a grim token of their visit in the middle of the floor. Mrs. Drake lay on her back, eyes staring glassily at the ceiling. A bullet had crashed through her right temple.

There were a series of shouts outside the house, more shots and then someone vaulted up the front steps, fled into the hallway and slammed the door. It was Jimmy Drake. There was a bad scratch on his cheek, his hair was tousled and his shirt ripped. He panted heavily and then sank to his knees against the wall, like a man utterly exhausted.

Butch didn't want to be seen. One of the Black Bat's instructions was for his aides to take cover when anything like this happened. Butch took a last look at the corpse, and his eyes became cold and grim. He retreated through the back door and put on full steam to reach Carol and the car before neighbors closed in.

THEN he thought of that gunman he'd hooked to the tree branch and returned for him, The man was half conscious, but Butch sent him back to dreamland with a short punch to the jaw. He draped the crook over his shoulder and performed that same leap across the hedge, despite the added burden he carried.

Carol wasn't in the car. Perhaps she was somewhere on the street. around the corner, where she might observe what was happening, Butch hastily opened the baggage compartment of the car, stuffed his prisoner inside and closed it again. Then he got behind the wheel, turned around and drove sedately toward Drake's house.

There was a crowd of people around, all highly agitated. Butch pulled up.

"Somethin' happen?" he queried with a bland, innocent look.

"I'll say it did," one man retorted. "Some murderers just invaded Jimmy Drake's house, fired a lot of shots and kidnapped his wife. They threw her into their car and got away."

Butch felt his spine tingle. Drake's wife was dead—not kidnapped. But it seemed that no one had come out of the house with that news. Therefore the woman who had been kidnapped was Carol!

There could be no doubt about it. She was nowhere around, and it wasn't like Carol to move out in a spot like this. Butch heard a siren and decided this was no place for him—not with an unconscious prisoner in the back of the car.

He got away without being spotted by the radio cars that raced to the scene. He was unnerved at Carol's disappearance and wasn't quite sure what he should do. The Black Bat would know, but Butch had no idea how to contact him.

One thing this giant of a man did realize though, was the fact that he held an ace in the hole. That gunman would talk—or he'd suffer until he did. Butch was not a pleasant man when he became angry and Butch was thoroughly mad. He headed for Tony Quinn's home to wait for his return.

There was nothing else he could do right now. If Quinn didn't come back shortly, Butch planned to extract certain information from his prisoner and tackle the job of rescuing Carol alone.

CAROL, while Butch headed for Drake's house, rounded the street corner and started for the same destination. She wanted to get close enough to read the registration plates on the car and get a good description of the marauders, if that was what they were. She had her answer to that in five seconds when the shooting started.

There was a bungalow next door, with several lilac bushes in the front yard. Carol sprinted toward one of these where she might hide and observe at the same time. In her desperate hurry to reach a hiding place she failed to notice that the driver of the car was, getting out. He had spotted her round the corner and kept his eyes on her every moment. When she disappeared, he went in pursuit.

Carol stood erect, depending on the shelter of the lilac bush to shield her. Twice she saw men pass by the windows of the living room. Then she heard a dry laugh, the whiz of a weapon as it sailed through the air, and a curtain of intense darkness settled over her brain.

She dropped without a sound. The thug put his gun back into its holster, picked her up and raced for the car. She was inside on the floor of the tonneau, when the others bolted from the house. One man clutched Jimmy Drake by the arm. Windows and doors were popping open all around the neighborhood now.

SOMEONE called out an alarm. It spurred the thugs on. Jimmy Drake suddenly gave a quick yank, tore himself free at the expense of his shirt, and made a wild dive back toward the house.

"Never mind him now," someone shouted from the car. "Get in here. We gotta scram. There'll be a million coppers here in two minutes."

The car darted from the curb, took the next corner with a crazy lurch and vanished. Carol woke up—probably from the jolting she received as the sedan raced away into the night. She tried to sit erect and instantly two hands seized her. She had been covered with a dirty, worn auto robe and this was removed now.

"Well! Look what we got here." A thug with a wide face, sloping forehead and the malicious eyes of a gorilla squinted down at her.

"It's gonna be just too bad to knock off a nice looking little lady like this. Maybe we won't have to. Get up and sit between us, sister, while we have a nice little chat, huh?"

When Carol didn't respond to the invitation, she was unceremoniously hoisted to the seat and jammed between two husky crooks. The one who had spoken first, seized her wrist and twisted it experimentally. Carol groaned and doubled up in pain. He let go.

"That's a sample of what we can do, baby. Suppose you tell us just who you are and why you were hanging around the neighborhood, peeking into Drake's window. It couldn't be that you work for the Voice of Justice, could it?"

Carol massaged her aching wrist.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I live up the street from the Drakes and I was on my way to the grocery store."

"Sure you were," the other man laughed harshly and held out Carol's pearl-handled automatic in one big hand. "Maybe you ought to join a gang like us, huh? Is this roscoe what you were gonna use to get the groceries? Or do all the dames around here pack gats? Come on—talk."

Carol had one last play to make, weak and probably quite ineffective, but she tried it anyhow.

"Okay, wise guy," she snarled. "So what if I did case the joint. Some of them bungalows got plenty of dough in 'em. Those kinda people don't trust banks none too much. I was just looking around."

"Listen to her, Heister," the second man said. "She sounds just like a moll, don't she? Musta seen too many movies."

"Stop lying," the crook called Heister snapped. "Who paid you to prowl around? Talk—or you get more of that strong arm treatment." He grabbed for her wrist, but the other crook snapped a command.

"Layoff. If she yells, we're in no spot to scram from the cops. Anyway I think we can use her to draw her pals into a nice quiet trap. Hey Joe," he addressed the driver, "head for that quiet little spot we found yesterday. She can yell her lungs raw there."

Carol was prepared for almost anything, but not the place to which she was driven. The car rolled upstate, in the general direction of Pierre Pierlot's strange workshop and dwelling, though Carol didn't realize this.

To her amazement the car pulled up close to an old, moss-covered church at the edge of a small town. One man got out, prowled the area for a moment and then drew a single key from his pocket. The land surrounding the church was shielded by a very tall brick wall with an ornamental gate set in it.

The crook opened this gate with his key, stepped aside and the car went through. Carol gave a brief cry of alarm. They were in an ancient burying ground.

TOMBSTONES and the mausoleums of wealthy families rose like grim gray ghosts in the night. They drove without lights, and the driver seemed to know all the intricate turns. This was a large cemetery and the car proceeded to the further side of it. The same crook used the same key on the door of a large vault. The crooks drew searchlights from their pockets, gripped Carol firmly by both wrists and forced her to enter that house of the dead.

She had a momentary glimpse of the name engraved above the door. It was in foot high letters and read simply "McKENDRICK." Inside she discovered the vault seemed to contain no niches behind which coffins could be sealed. It looked more like small, formal waiting room than anything else. There was an ornamental iron bench along one wall, two iron chairs moulded in the same design and a cement stand upon which flowers could be placed.

One of the thugs grinned at Carol and turned the ray of his flash against the further wall. There she saw a solid iron gate, its engraved design matching the furniture. This was opened with the same key, and Carol was forced to walk down a short flight of cement steps.

They were so narrow that she was permitted to walk alone, but the crooks were more than reasonably safe in allowing this because Carol soon found that the dead of the McKendrick family were buried in a crypt below the vault. There were no exits except those narrow stairs which were now crowded by two of the thugs.

The flashlights illuminated the place brilliantly and now Carol shuddered at the sight of almost a

dozen niches, all sealed and each one bearing an inscription which described the corpse that lay behind the sections of marble.

One of the thugs had secured rope somewhere and a piece of dirty cloth, probably used to clean off the windshield of their car. Carol was tied up expertly and the dirty cloth tied between her lips as a gag. She was pushed into a corner and the trio hurried back up the stairs. Carol heard that heavy door close and she was alone with the dead.

She backed against one wall and allowed herself to slowly sag toward the cold floor. At least she could rest. When those crooks returned, she'd need every ounce of strength she could muster. The ropes around her wrists and the ankles were firmly tied.

No chance of getting them loose, but the gag offered possibilities. The man who tied it in place had seemed uncommonly gentle about it for one of his breed. In less than three minutes Carol managed to move the gag out of her mouth, down her chin and then, by careful manipulation of her jaws, the gag dropped loosely about her throat.

At any rate she could scream, but though her eerie surroundings encouraged this, she kept quiet. The time for screaming was when she had a chance to arouse someone besides those gangsters.

One thing Carol didn't know however, was that the gag had been purposely placed so that she could get it loose. Heister addressed his fellow thugs. They were hidden behind another mausoleum about thirty feet from the McKendrick tomb.

"Manny must have been caught," he said grimly. "Maybe by the giant who met this dame down the street. Manny knows what to do if that happened. He'll spill the works about this place and whoever the dame works for will come here in a rush.

"She'll have the gag loose pretty soon. When her pals enter the first floor of the vault, they'll hear her yell and they'll go down to the sub-vault in a hurry.

"All we gotta do is push the door shut, lock it and leave. They'll all rot down there. Nobody ever comes to this place. What a swell idea to get rid of guys we don't like. Boy, have I got brains!"

CHAPTER VIII
Treasure Hunt

WITH his hood and cape removed, and that wide-brimmed hat concealing his features the Black Bat rode beside Silk. They headed down the street which ran beside Tony Quinn's estate. The Black Bat started up.

"Stop, Silk," he said. "Butch's car is parked just ahead of us. He's alone in it. Get out and find out what's up."

Silk returned in a moment, pale with worry.

"It's Carol, sir. Some killers snatched her. Butch has one of the mob in the baggage compartment. Maybe he'll talk."

"Maybe, eh?" the Black Bat said bitterly. "He'll talk all right. Have Butch carry him far back on the estate. It's dark as pitch there and he'll never know where he's been. I'll get out at the gate."

Certain no prying eyes watched, the Black Bat slipped out of the car, glided across the sidewalk and vanished in the darkness. Butch carried his half-conscious prisoner through that same gate. Silk waited just beyond the estate, prepared for swift action.

Butch flung his prisoner on the ground and faced the Black Bat, who was now wearing hood and cape.

"Boss—they got Carol. I don't know exactly what happened, but I know they snatched her. I grabbed this bozo. Lemme go to work on him. I'll make the rat sing like a canary or bust his neck."

"We can't waste time," the Black Bat said. "Lift him up. If he refuses to answer my questions, go to work on him."

The thug, blubbering in terror, grew absolutely frantic when he saw the eerie figure that looked more like a bird than a man. He knew who this man was and he shrank away.

"Don't kill me," he blubbered. "I'll talk. I'll tell you everything I know. If they got the dame, I know where they took her. You gotta promise I go free after I show you where she is."

"You have that promise," the Black Bat said. "Where is she? Why was she kidnapped? Whom do you work for?"

"Ask him why his mob gunned out Drake's wife," Butch put in.

The Black Bat made a sharp quarter turn and behind the hood, his eyes grew wide.

"They killed Mrs. Drake? Are you sure? What happened to Jimmy Drake?"

"She's dead all right, boss. Bullet right through her head. Drake was okay last I knew."

The Black Bat seized his prisoner by both shoulders and shook him.

"Well? Why was Mrs. Drake murdered?"

"I dunno, honest, I don't," the man quavered. "Heister is in charge of us. He said we was to grab Drake, but he didn't say anythin' about knockin' off no woman.

"I guess she musta got in the way and Heister let her have it. He's got an awful nervous trigger finger and the gat he uses is filed down. They took the other dame to a cemetery.

"It's outa town, but I can take you there. Remember—you gotta let me go free for this. Heister'll cut my heart out for talkin', and I'm gonna scram."

"Use his cravat and belt to tie him up with," the

Black Bat ordered. "Then gag him. Carry him to the other car. We'll follow. Hurry!"

Two minutes later, Silk had a well-trussed passenger seated beside him. Acting under the thug's instructions, Silk proceeded to follow the route over which Carol had been taken. Behind the sedan came Butch and the cheap coupé, which could show her heels to a car of much more expensive make.

The Black Bat sat silently beside Butch. Paramount in his mind was Carol's peril, but he also wondered why on earth Mrs. Drake had been murdered and why anyone would want to attack Jimmy Drake.

TRUE, the Voice of Justice knew that Drake was in Tony Quinn's office and why.

It indicated the Voice knew what was going on, but why did that make Jimmy Drake or his quiet, lovely wife a target for these crooks?

Had Jimmy Drake held out? Were there other crimes to which he hadn't confessed? Was he associated with the Voice and were these crooks after him because the Voice threatened to upset an underworld empire?

"That mug in Silk's car sure was scared of us," Butch interrupted the Black Bat's chain of thought. "I never saw a rat squeal so fast before."

The Black Bat frowned.

"I thought of that too. It seems to me he talked too easily, as though plans had already been made for just such an emergency. Keep your eyes and ears open, Butch. We won't walk into any trap if we can help it."

They reached the ancient church and its burying grounds. It was nearly three A.M. and the village was deserted. Silk stepped out of the sedan, with his hat brim low and his collar turned up to shield his features from the crook. He dragged the man out and the Black Bat joined them.

"I ain't got no key," the crook gulped. "Heister's got one that opens the gate and the tomb too. We'll have to go over the wall."

"Give me a boost," the Black Bat said, and Silk helped to hoist him over the wall. Butch arrived in time to lift the trussed-up thug very high and ease him gently over into the Black Bat's waiting arms. Silk came next and finally Butch, who scrambled over easily.

"Our friend," the Black Bat said softly, "tells me the girl must be locked up in the McKendrick vault. It's at the further end of the cemetery, and I think I can find it from his directions. I'll leave our prisoner here. You stay with him."

The Black Bat indicated Silk. With Butch at his side, they started forward in the direction of the tomb. Wary of traps, they moved carefully and paused every two or three yards to listen. The Black Bat's eyes penetrated the darkness and finally read the inscription on the vault which had now become a tomb for the living.

They approached it and then Carol's voice reached them, faint but definite. The sound of that voice and its

The prisoner took a quick look at the gun and started to run.

implied horror, spurred the Black Bat into swift action. Gun ready, he raced toward the vault.

The grilled door was open and he went in, closely followed by Butch. Neither of them saw three figures rise up directly to the right. All that mattered now was Carol's safety.

Silk, left behind with his quivering prisoner, eyed the man speculatively. He seemed to be almost frozen in terror, and Silk didn't like it. This might mean that the crook was afraid of the consequences if the Black Bat and his giant aides were trapped.

"Listen, you," Silk whispered, "there's something wrong. I think this is a set-up, and you know it. So just to make sure everything is on the level, you and I are going to that tomb too—right now. Move or I'll knock you stiff and drag your carcass there."

The prisoner made ineffectual sounds before he found his tongue. He knew what was about to happen and if he was taken into that vault, he'd be left to die there too.

"No-no, pal. Don't go there. Yeah-yeah, it is a trap. When the Black Bat goes inside, some guys will shut the door on him. They'll leave him there to rot. Don't take me in. They'll kill us too."

SILK whipped out a knife and the prisoner started to give a bleat of alarm before Silk cuffed him into silence and slit the ropes around his arms and legs.

"We're going there all right," he said. "How many of your pals are hanging around?"

"Three anyway—and they got guns. Listen, I did my part. Lemme go. I don't want to die now."

"Walk!" The knife penetrated the prisoner's clothing and pierced his spine. "Head for that vault fast or I'll sink this blade right up to the hilt in your stinking hide."

The prisoner moved rapidly. Silk knew that in a battle with three well-armed thugs, he'd probably be outmatched. If he failed, they'd certainly kill the Black Bat, Butch and Carol before they left the graveyard. Silk had an idea. He drew a gun and then gave the prisoner a hard shove forward.

"Before I tackle your pals, I'll finish you off," he grated. "You deserve something for bringing us here so I'll give you thirty seconds to get clear. Then I start to shoot, and, brother, I don't miss very often. Get going. Your time has started all ready."

The prisoner gulped, took a quick look at the gun and started to run. In his haste, he tripped over a footstone, fell heavily and yelled in fear. Up again, he charged straight through a dry bush that crackled loudly in the silence. He kept on going in as straight a direction as he knew, toward the main gate.

Silk, lying flat to conceal himself, saw three men suddenly materialize out of the night and go in pursuit. He made very sure there were three of them too before he streaked toward the vault.

The grilled door was open. Silk called out softly and received no reply. Sweat poured down his face. He fumbled for a match, struck it and took in his surroundings. He spotted the steel door and sprang toward it.

The latch worked, but the door held fast. His friends must be somewhere beyond this door. Silk had to get it open. In a few moments the thugs might return. Another match showed him the lock and Silk jammed the muzzle of his gun against it.

He pulled the trigger. Pieces of lead flew back to cut his cheeks, but he paid no attention to this. He tried the latch again. It wouldn't open. He fired another shot. This time things happened. The door swung wide.

A dark figure came swarming up the narrow staircase. It was the Black Bat. Behind him came Carol and Butch was the last.

"Good work," the Black Bat said. "What happened to the men who locked us in?"

"I made our prisoner dust for it, knowing he'd make so much noise he'd attract his own pals. I—"

"Quiet!" The Black Bat stepped out of the tomb and listened. His keen hearing detected the sound of a motor roaring into life and then tires grating against gravel.

"They've gone," he said. "Or at least I'm pretty sure of it. Probably those shots frightened them away, but I doubt there are any people close enough to this graveyard to be awakened by the noise. Carol—you're not hurt? Sure of it?"

"Just my dignity," Carol brushed off her dress. "Those mugs were not especially gentle. And being locked in a vault with nothing but a lot of coffins around you isn't pleasant either."

"Wait," Butch growled. "Wait until I lay my mitts on those rats. If I grab 'em on 42nd Street you'll hear them yell around Spuyten Dyvil. We better get outa here, huh?"

"Wait," the Black Bat said. "I'm going back down. Butch, you stay with Carol. Silk, use your flash, shield the lens and look around the immediate vicinity. See if you can find any traces of cement and mixing tools."

"Only one of the niches below was recently sealed. The cement isn't completely dry yet. Look at the floor where Carol is standing. They used it to mix fresh cement. Watch out for the return of those killers, Butch."

BEFORE he descended into the crypt again, the Black Bat glanced at the lock which Silk's bullets had shattered. Part of it was blown out. The Black Bat picked up a section of shiny, new brass. That lock hadn't been a part of the original door, but a much more modern safe-guard placed there within the past year or two.

Below, he went unerringly to the right niche despite the intense darkness. Using a narrow piece of metal which he carried with him most of the time and used to open difficult windows, he dug at still wet cement until he had removed most of it. He called to Butch, and the giant entered the tomb, hunched over like a huge gnome.

"See if you can take that slab of marble away," the Black Bat said. "I'll help with the other end."

Butch got a grip on the slab and pulled it free without much effort. But the big fellow, standing in the glare of a flashlight held by the Black Bat, was prepared to see a casket behind that slab. There was one too—of a strange type. No more than a foot long and five or six inches wide. Butch licked his lips and decided the Black Bat should handle the rest of it.

The casket was a wooden box with big brass ornamental hinges on it. Raising the lid, the Black Bat grunted in amazement. The box was almost entirely filled with jewelry. He picked up several pieces.

"Odd," he said. "This stuff isn't the most valuable jewelry in the world—even despite its quantity. The stones aren't genuine in every case, and there is considerable gold plate too.

"I wonder who hid it here and why? These crooks we routed entered this niche. Perhaps they secreted the stuff here, or were after it in which case they must have decided it wasn't worth taking—which is quite true."

The Black Bat examined the interior of the niche carefully. When he straightened up again, he was positive that no casket had ever been enclosed. The marble slab showed that one Hazel McKendrick had been born on April 10th, 1892, and died December 1st, 1916.

Silk called down from the vault above.

"I found half a bag of cement, sir. Some sand and a pail full of water too. They were mixing cement all right."

"Go up and bring it to me," the Black Bat told Butch. "I want Silk to remain on guard with Carol."

It was within an hour of dawn when Butch and the Black Bat finished cementing the marble slab into place. The gems were left in the niche, and all traces of their work cleaned up.

CHAPTER IX
The Blind Man Sees

BUTCH and Carol returned to their respective homes, while Silk and the Black Bat used the tunnel from the garden house to the lab. As they entered the house, a phone was buzzing insistently. The Black Bat hastily stripped off his regalia and became Tony Quinn once more. Picking up his cane, he moved to the secret door and his eyes became utterly blank again. He reached the telephone, picked up the receiver and gave a sleepy greeting.

It was Jimmy Drake.

"I've been trying to get you for hours," he said, almost angrily. The shock of his wife's death had probably worn off to some extent, although Drake sounded excited.

"I'm very sorry," Quinn replied. "My man is off for the night. I heard the phone ring, but I couldn't reach it before you hung up. I move rather slowly, you see."

"Makes no difference now," Drake groaned. "Around midnight a bunch of men came to my house. They tried to kidnap me. My wife butted in, and they murdered her—shot her down in cold blood! I've got to see you right away. I can come over."

"Please do," Quinn advised. "I shall be waiting."

He hung up, turned to Silk and gave orders.

"Get me pajamas—wrinkle them up first—and a robe and slippers. Then keep out of sight. You're supposed to be out for the night. Remember?"

Quinn let Drake in and led the way to his study. Drake was haggard-eyed and pale. He looked years older. He began to pace the floor and give all the gruesome details of the murder. The man seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

"There is a liquor cabinet near the bookcase," said Quinn. "Help yourself. I think you need a drink."

Drake got a bottle of brandy and poured himself a copious drink. He bolted this and seemed to relax a bit.

"I can't understand it," he said for the tenth time. "Why should they want to kill my wife? Why did they try to kidnap me? And what will I do now? I'm all alone. They might as well have killed me too."

"I can't answer your questions," Quinn said quietly. "Perhaps if I undertake to try and refresh your memory, you might do so. You will recall, Mr. Drake, that you were not exactly frank with me when you first confessed to stealing money from your present employer."

Drake looked even more downcast.

"I know it. It was because of her—my wife. I didn't want her to think she married a crook. Well I'm not a crook—not the type to hurt anyone at least. I was tempted. I suppose I'm weak, and I took the money, intending to pay it back.

"I have a theory though. Suppose this man who called himself the Voice of Justice knows all about me—as it seems he does.

"Suppose certain crooks whom the Voice is fighting believe I'm in with the Voice, maybe known who he is. They'd try to make me tell, wouldn't they?"

The casket was filled with jewelry.

Quinn stroked his chin and stared at the blank wall.

"Yes—that's logical. Should have thought of it myself. Because of his intimate knowledge of your affairs the underworld believed you know him.

"That must be the reason and it proves the Voice of Justice really is on the level. Of course, there is no other answer. Do you know him, Drake?"

I've tried and tried to think," Drake groaned. "I've even written down the names of everyone who could possibly have learned of what I did in Chicago. I've got about twenty names, but I can't imagine which one of these persons could be the Voice.

"Listen—can't you help me? Ask the Voice to expose those murderers and avenge my wife's death. I shall be beholden to you and to him for the rest of my life. All I want is to see those rotten killers where they belong—in a murderer's cell."

"I can't do that because I don't know how to contact the Voice. He always takes the initiative, but I'll try to help. I'll spur the police on. You can identify these killers of course. We'll conduct a roundup and you can attend the lineup. It's our best bet."

"Thanks," Drake said sadly. "Captain McGrath already has made plans to do just that. Well, I suppose there's nothing to do now but wait. Wait and hope."

"I'm afraid that is all, Drake," said Quinn. "I'll have your trial postponed for a month or two. Under the circumstances that won't be very difficult. Keep your wits about you.

"If you should happen to spot any of those killers, call a police officer. Don't risk your life to try and nab them. Good night. If there is anything I might do in connection with your wife—"

Drake didn't answer. He just walked out into the approaching dawn. Quinn locked up and climbed the stairs to his bedroom.

HIS first visitor, when he reached the office, was Commissioner Warner.

"Rotten thing that happened to your client last night, Tony. I hope it isn't an omen—for the sake of the rest of your clients."

"If it is," Quinn grunted, "I'll retire. I've another case, Commissioner. Oh yes, I'm coming right along. This one is in connection with a rather involved estate. Do you know the McKendrick family?"

"I should," Warner grunted. "Went to school with Paul McKendrick, and I helped to arrest his son, Randolph. I see by that bright look on your face that you wish all the details. They aren't so many.

"The McKendricks used to be extremely wealthy people. The bulk of their fortune was made before the Civil War. Steel rails, I think it was—just when so many were being used to lay new railroad tracks. Anyway, each succeeding generation dwindled the income.

"Paul did a pretty good job of it and Randolph finished the business. Seems Randolph operated a brokerage house and took a lot of money from his clients. He got them mainly because of his name, not by the hard work such an enterprise usually involves.

"WELL—it's the usual story. Randolph was broke, used to living high, and he began paying dividends from the money entrusted to him. The rest he spent until things caught up with him.

"He got a one to two year rap. Got out of prison—now wait just one minute, Tony. Are you sure you aren't pumping me? Are you really handling this estate?"

"Why?" Quinn queried with a grin.

"Because this Randolph McKendrick is one of the best possibilities for our Voice of Justice. He's educated, comes of a very good family and spent time in prison. He must have met plenty of criminals there.

"Perhaps he got religion or something, and now he's attempting to expose crooks—finish them off by revealing their jobs and taking their loot away. It's a mighty good answer to our puzzle."

"Isn't it?" Quinn said. "By the way, when my clerk arrived this morning, there was a note under the door. I had him read it to me. I'm to tune in on my very private radio in just two minutes to learn how another criminal is to be exposed.

"Will you snap on the switch? This thing is so complicated. And dial the numbers in this note too. I could do it. My sense of touch enables me to follow the indentations of the dials, but there isn't much time."

Warner set the dials, and they leaned back to wait. Quinn asked one more question.

"About the McKendrick family again—did you ever meet Hazel? She died in 1916 at the age of twenty-four."

"Hazel? There was no McKendrick named Hazel. You've been digging into the wrong family, Tony."

There was no time to argue the point. The Voice of Justice spoke again, his tone ringing with triumph.

"Now you realize that I am not a fool—that I know what I'm talking about. Junky Malone was found as I indicated, even though the stupid creature took his own life.

"Here is another for you. Remember that large scale burglary of the Holden Estate down in Florida a year and six months ago? Those eccentric people kept a lot of cash in the house and a great deal of jewelry which was worth more as heirlooms than cash.

"I can tell you who did that job and where to find

him. He is Siggy Fox, another moronic creature like Malone. For the past week Siggy has been holed up, living in fear of death at the hands of his own type of people.

"I don't know what Siggy did to make them pursue him with murderous intentions, but you will find him in a basement room of a large apartment building at 1169 Allerton Boulevard. The reward is ten thousand dollars which, Mr. Quinn, you will arrange to have immediately turned over to you by Holden's New York bank.

"I shall contact you further as to its disposition. May I thank you for the able manner in which you handled last night's episode? That is all."

Warner snapped off the radio and reached for the telephone. He ordered a squad to close in on Siggy's hideout and then he jammed on his hat.

"I'm coming along, Commissioner," said Quinn, rising. "A little excitement in my life is like honey to me. I'm really beginning to live again."

Warner's chauffeur used the siren to clear traffic, and they raced up Allerton Boulevard, only half a minute behind the squad cars. It was an exclusive section, where apartment rents were high. Certainly it was not a place where police would search for Siggy Fox without being first tipped off.

"What will you bet," Quinn said, "that Siggy is dead when you reach him?"

"Eh? What?" Warner whirled around. "Why did you say that, Tony?"

QUINN smiled. "I'm just guessing, but I'm rather good at it. Run along. Your chauffeur will guide my steps to Siggy's place, and I'm not especially anxious to run into a fight. Doubt I'd be much good at it."

When Quinn, holding the arm of the Commissioner's chauffeur, walked down a driveway between the huge buildings, his staring eyes functioned even though they looked completely blind. He saw two detectives covering a doorway into the basement, saw them jump at the sound of a gunshot, then rush in. Quinn and his guide entered too. Warner saw them coming and appeared through the shattered door.

"Tony," he said, "that was too good a prediction to be a guess. We found the door locked, demanded entrance and Siggy yelled something about we were too late and he wouldn't be taken. Perhaps the poor sap thought we were those crooks bent on killing him.

"At any rate, just before we crashed down the door, he fired a shot into his own head. Just how were you so sure he'd commit suicide?"

"Did I mention suicide?" Quinn asked blandly. "Don't ask me any more questions right now, Commissioner, because I'm not prepared to answer them. Are we in the room where Siggy lies now?"

"No—I'll help you through the door. Tony. Watch out—one of my men broke it to splinters, and you might tear your coat. Now you're through. Edge to the left slightly or you'll trip over him. You can stand there now and listen while we make a check of things."

"Thanks. I—Commissioner, am I stepping on something? Feels like a marble."

Warner bent down and picked up an earring.

"I'd like to be a kid again if I could play with marbles like these. That was a piece of jewelry you stepped on, Tony. Siggy stole a lot of the stuff. you remember. Like Junky Malone. he couldn't cash in on it because the stuff was hot as Hades itself, and not worth the risk for any fence to handle."

QUINN was facing a single window in the small room. He guessed how Siggy had found this refuge. It was a janitor's room, probably used by the superintendent's assistant, who could have been Siggy.

The window was open about half an inch from the top, and sunlight came through it brilliantly. Without moving his eyes, Quinn spotted a round mark on the wall, just inside that window. It was a wet stain about the size of a quarter—or one of those small rubber suction cups that are used to adhere to smooth surfaces.

Quinn saw something else that startled him so that he almost gave an involuntary cry. A man was slowly approaching the rear of the place. He was about thirty, well dressed and intelligent looking. No cheap crook this.

He was crouched and flitted from behind a refuse box to the end of a row of garages. Then he stood erect and on his face was a look of the most intense surprise Quinn had ever seen. The stranger must have spotted a detective or patrolmen in the driveway. At any rate he turned and fled as if Satan were behind him.

"What are you looking at?" a voice spoke harshly in Quinn's ear. The speaker meant to get an answer from sheer surprise, but Quinn didn't fall. He just turned slightly and looked over Captain McGrath's right shoulder.

"Looking at, Captain?" he asked. "Heaven knows I'd give my last dollar to be able to look out at that sunshine which warmed me just now. I'm sorry, Captain. I can't—as you say—look."

"All right," McGrath grunted. "Chalk that one up to your side again, but some day—"

"You'll really pin me down and remove a hood and cape to show me up as the Black Bat," Quinn finished for him, and McGrath flushed a dull red.

"I'm complimented in the fact that you even think I might be the Black Bat because he is

shrewd, Captain. Clever enough to outwit you, eh? Let's forget it. Tell me just how the body is lying, which hand holds the gun. Is there much blood?"

"His feet are directly in line with you," McGrath said. "There's a cheap nickel plated .32 in his right hand. There's a hole in his right temple, and it isn't bleeding much. Bullet is still inside, I guess. Say—why are you asking me all these questions? Anybody would think Siggy hadn't taken the old suey route."

"Perhaps he didn't," Quinn said enigmatically. "Just to be sure, why don't you search the building?"

"Aw nuts!" McGrath strode away, cast a backward glance at Quinn and rotated a finger near his head. Quinn didn't indicate that he could see all this. Yet Quinn knew just how this murder had been accomplished.

He would have liked to point it out to Warner, but how could he? Tony Quinn was blind and could see no clues. The police were blind too, in that the clues stared them in the face and they didn't recognize them.

According to Quinn's calculations Siggy was supposed to be hiding out with his life in danger every moment. Then why would he leave a window open, even from the top? Secondly, there had been no rich smell of cordite in the room, and if Siggy shot himself an instant before the police broke in, that odor would have persisted despite the open window.

Quinn thought he knew the significance of that window too—and the round wet mark which was already rapidly fading away. A wire might have come through the window opening. The wet mark might have been where a tiny amplifier was attached to the wall. From somewhere above a man had spoken to represent himself as Siggy, who was already dead.

THE shot Warner heard could have been fired high above this room and in a manner which muffled its sound except through the amplifier. This done, the police, positive they had heard Siggy's voice and the fatal shot, the amplifier had been easily yanked loose from the wall, hauled through the window and up the outside wall. There were times when Quinn deplored the fact that he must pose as a blind man.

CHAPTER X
The Man in Hiding

RETURNING to his office again, Tony Quinn really did find clients waiting. It was routine stuff, but it showed that people were perfectly willing to trust a blind lawyer. For a while Quinn wondered if clients were going to interfere with his work as the Black Bat. There was little time to think over this latest phase of the case, Siggy Fox's death.

Jimmy Drake showed up with some insurance papers which Winkie, Quinn's law clerk, filled out. Then, at five-thirty, Quinn was alone in the office. He leaned back and exhaled in relief. That spell of comfort didn't last long. Quinn's phone rang. A shrill-voiced young boy was on the wire.

"Is this Mr. Tony Quinn, the lawyer?" he asked and, receiving an affirmative reply, went on. "A man just gave me a dollar to read a paper to you. He says you should have a pencil and paper handy to take down some figures. Have you got a pencil and some papers?"

"Let her go," Quinn invited and knew just what was coming. The Voice of Justice was becoming increasingly ingenious with his devices to contact Quinn.

"It says," the shrill voice spoke rapidly, "to turn dial one to twelve, dial two to twenty-nine and dial three to seventy-four. Wait between five forty-five and seven o'clock. You got that, mister?"

"I've got it," Quinn answered. "By the way what did the man who gave you the note look like? Where did he meet you?"

"I'm in a drug store at the corner of 14th Street and Fourth Avenue," the boy explained. "I was walking by a car when a man called me. I couldn't see his face on account of too many shadows and he had his hat pulled down. He was a nice man though. Gosh I got a whole dollar."

Quinn thanked him deeply, hung up and turned on the radio. This thing was beginning to irk him. More and more he believed he was being made a dupe of—that the Voice of Justice was politely forcing him to aid in the commission of crimes which included murder.

The Voice of Justice came on the air at six-ten. His message was brief.

"So Siggy killed himself too. No matter—the man wasn't worthy of the privilege of life. Tonight, at midnight, you will be near Pierre Pierlot's place. The same procedure is to be followed, and I trust you will adhere to my faith in you. The ten thousand dollar reward is to be paid over.

"Ask Mr. Pierlot to describe his invention to you some time. You will be most interested and understand just why I am trying to help him. I shall inform Pierlot you will be there. Don't forget the reward—which I presume you collected according to the instructions I gave you. That is all."

Quinn shut off the switch and squeezed out a cigarette butt with considerable violence.

"You presume rightly," he muttered. "I've got the reward. One of these days I'll get you too."

SILK called for him shortly after and escorted his

blind employer to the car. It was parked directly in front of the building with a no parking sign almost blocking one door. A patrolman was writing down the plate numbers on a ticket, but when he saw Quinn, he crumpled the ticket and helped him climb in.

"Imagine," he grinned, "I was just about to plaster a summons on your bus, Mr. Quinn. You can tell your chauffeur he can park here any time when he calls for you. I remember a couple of things you did for me when you were the D.A."

Quinn sank back.

"At least," he said to Silk as the car pulled away, "somebody appreciates me. I tried to tip McGrath off to a juicy murder today, and he very indiscreetly indicated I was slightly balmy.

"Oh well—we've work to do. Another trip to Pierlot's for one thing. I've got ten thousand dollars tucked in my pocket. Ought to make the old boy's eyes light up."

"If you ask me," Silk retorted, "Pierlot knows plenty about this Voice of Justice. I heard a broadcast about Siggy Fox's death. I suppose that's the murder you refer to."

"Right—and it was murder. Cleverly done too. You know, Silk, I think we've bowed to the orders and whims of the Voice long enough. Beginning now we'll take the offensive and see what happens."

After a hasty dinner, Silk donned a disguise, left through the secret tunnel and got the coupé which was parked not far from the garden gate. When he pulled up in it, the Black Bat's shadowy form slipped from Quinn's estate and entered the coupé.

"We'll go to Linden Place and look over the territory. There's a certain man named McKendrick who lives there. I'd like to have him explain just why his family vaults contain a crypt without a coffin engraved with the name of a family member who never existed.

"You recall the jewelry hidden in that crypt? It turned up this morning—strewn all around Siggy Fox's cadaver. Maybe Randolph McKendrick can account for it."

The McKendrick estate was huge and dismal. It needed repairs badly. The roof was peeling, huge porch uprights, once white, had turned to a dirty grey. Weeds had grown up through the spaces between the sidewalk flags.

The lawn was overrun with brush and the many trees were sadly in need of a trimming. Rotted branches lay all around.

In contrast to the neighboring estates, the McKendrick place was definitely on the seedy side.

"Rum looking joint," Silk grunted. "Looks like nobody took care of it for months."

"A year to be exact," the Black Bat put in. "McKendrick, the only survivor of an illustrious family, spent that much time in prison. I imagine there was no money to keep the place up.

"Turn around, Silk, and drop me right in front of the place. This time I'll use the front door. McKendrick is in. I saw a light in one of the back rooms."

SOME of the porch floorboards were curled up and most of them loosened by rain and wind. The doorbell had no button, but there was a hefty brass knocker, and the Black Bat rattled it hard. He heard someone approach the door.

It was thrown open by a man who started back in fear of the hooded visitor who confronted him. McKendrick didn't know it, but his visitor almost started back in the same degree of amazement. McKendrick was the man Quinn had seen approaching Siggy Fox's hideout that same morning.

"What do you want?" McKendrick gasped. "I know who you are. I heard some of the boys—" he stopped as if he thought he'd said too much.

"Do you mean the gentlemen in prison?" the Black Bat stepped into the immense reception hall. It contained no furniture, not even a rug.

"I imagine some of them remember me inasmuch as I put them behind bars. Please close the door, Mr. McKendrick. You don't have to fear me—unless you are criminally involved in the business I happen to be investigating. Is there some place we can talk?"

McKendrick gulped. "The kitchen. It's the only room left with any furniture in it. I sold the rest of the stuff. Had to. A man must eat."

He led the way into a spacious kitchen and sat down. The Black Bat put one foot on the seat of a straight-backed chair and eyed McKendrick with some doubt.

"There are two questions I'd like you to answer," he said slowly. "The first one concerns Siggy Fox. Just what were you doing in the vicinity of his hideout on this particular morning?"

"How did you know that?" McKendrick started up and then sat back again with a groan of disgust. "What's the use? The boys at the Bib House were right. You go everywhere and see everything. You never miss a trick.

"All right, I'll tell you. Siggy was my cellmate in prison. I wanted to see him because I thought—well, it was just a personal matter. I spotted the cops and beat it. Later on, I heard Siggy was dead and the holdup of the Holden house in Florida pinned right in his lap.

"I had nothing to do with his death. We were friends. Siggy was a nice little guy, never hurt anyone, but he was like me, trying to make a living the easy way."

"Siggy," the Black Bat said, "didn't commit

suicide, McKendrick. He was murdered. Are you surprised at that statement?"

"No," McKendrick looked up defiantly. "I knew darn well Siggy never took his own life. He was too much of a coward. And just to prove to you I wasn't implicated, I'll also tell you that Siggy never pulled that Holden job. It was a physical impossibility."

"Ah! Now we're getting somewhere." The Black Bat edged his chair closer to the ex-convict. "Go on."

"The Holden job was pulled in January 1940. I checked and that's accurate. That same month—all of it—Siggy was in a small town hoosegow out West. The Sheriff picked him up as a vagrant.

"Siggy got thirty days and figured it as a big joke. The reason he thought it so funny was because the Sheriff was a little careless or slow about things.

"He didn't send Siggy's fingerprints to the F.B.I. until just before Siggy got out. There was a 'wanted' sign posted on Siggy's record, but by the time the news got back to the Sheriff, Siggy was gone.

"They picked him up later on though, right here in New York, and he got a year in stir. So how could Siggy have pulled a job at the same time when he was in jail a couple of thousand miles away from Florida?"

"Fine," the Black Bat approved. "Now let's see if you can really take it. In your family vault at the old cemetery, is a niche engraved with the name of Hazel. I know that there never was a Hazel McKendrick. Who or what really is buried there?"

This time McKendrick really did jump to his feet and his face turned alternately beet red and alabaster white.

"You were there. Blast you! You did it! The boys always wondered what you got out of your racket. Now I know. I ought to—"

McKendrick suddenly grabbed the chair in which he'd been sitting and hurled it at the Black Bat. This action was very quick, wholly unexpected, and the Black Bat hardly prepared for the assault. He managed to dodge the chair, but McKendrick reached a table, yanked open a drawer and held a gun in his fist a second later.

"Reach," McKendrick raged. "I'm not afraid of you. You're not a cop. I won't be reported to the parole officer for this. You can't face the cops any more than I can.

"You're the dirty slinking rat who stole what belonged to me—what I earned up there in prison. You took it all and left me to starve!"

"So there was money hidden in that crypt." The Black Bat didn't move. "I thought you might admit that if you became riled enough. Now use your head and put that gun down. I didn't take your money."

"Nobody else knew about it except Siggy and he didn't steal it," McKendrick howled. "What if I did steal that money? I served my time and paid for it. I hid that cash in the vault to tide me over when I got out of prison.

"It was mine, I tell you. I worked for it. I'll kill you. I'll say you sneaked into my home. I have a right to protect myself. I'll—"

The Black Bat had been standing with both hands on the back of his chair. Suddenly, he went into action. Seizing the chair, he lunged sideways, hurled the chair high. It struck the domed light which illuminated the kitchen. It crashed, and the room was in darkness.

"Now what good is your gun?" the Black Bat snapped. "Two can play the same game, and I have a weapon of my own. I can see you, and you don't know where I am. If you open fire, McKendrick, I'll wing you. Be sensible—I didn't come here to harm you. I wanted information and you gave it to me."

But McKendrick seemed obsessed with the idea that the Black Bat was responsible for what had happened. He was half crouched behind the kitchen table, as evident to the Black Bat's eyes as if a white spot played on him.

McKendrick heard a stealthy movement and fired. The bullet whizzed about two feet to the right of the Black Bat. McKendrick yanked the trigger again and missed by a still wider margin.

Then a slug spanged against the tabletop, nicking it inches from his nose. The Black Bat had missed purposely, but McKendrick didn't know that. This close brush with death seemed to take all the fight out of him and nothing remained but terror and the thoughts of flight.

He whirled, knocked aside chairs, overturned the table and took a headlong dive out of a wide, large window. The glass smashed to bits, but his weight and the impetus of his rush carried him right through. The Black Bat spotted McKendrick dodging crazily amid the trees and bushes.

He could have shot the man down, but he held his fire. Nothing would be gained by killing or crippling McKendrick. The man had told him all the information he needed. Yet the Black Bat had doubts. Perhaps McKendrick was acting a part for his benefit, intending to lend the idea that he was just a helpless pawn in the net of circumstance. McKendrick, as Warner had mentioned, could have made a perfect Voice of Justice.

The shooting was bound to arouse the neighborhood, and it was no place for the Black Bat. He risked a few moments during which he examined the rest of the house. It was practically empty. The only furniture left was old, decrepit and not worthwhile hauling away.

Silk picked him up, and they dodged curious neighbors and a couple of patrolmen running toward the scene.

CHAPTER XI
Council of War

FIVE minutes before midnight, Tony Quinn's limousine turned slowly off the highway into that narrow, little-used road from which Pierre Pierlot's strange electric car picked up visitors. As the limousine was guided along this lane by Silk, the left rear door opened and Butch O'Leary jumped out to dive into the brush without the slightest pause. Butch had certain orders to follow.

Tony Quinn sat in the back seat, both hands on the crook of his cane. He was a blind man again—and the Voice of Justice's contact agent with ten thousand dollars to lend an inventor.

Silk stopped short as the mileage reached the proper position. Tony Quinn got out and waited. Soon the strong light beamed down on him, and the funny little black car came rolling up. Quinn followed Pierlot's directions on how to locate the door handle, got in and was taken to the garage again.

"Thank you, thank you." Pierlot accepted the packet of bills. "If this keeps on, I shall have more than enough to finish my experiments. The Voice of Justice must be a great man. Clever too, in the way he traps criminals.

"Oh, yes, before I forget, there is a mild warning, Mr. Quinn. Last time you came here, you were followed. By the Black Bat! Of course I know he is as cunning as the Voice and you are—well—certainly not hard to keep track of.

"I can hardly be so inconsiderate as to accuse you of carelessness. No matter anyway. The Black Bat is on our side. I merely wished to point out that someone else might follow you here."

"I shall instruct my driver to be most careful," Quinn said. "We shall take roundabout ways to reach you as well. I wish I could be more alert, but my eyes—"

Pierlot patted Quinn's shoulder.

"Forget it, my friend. You have been very kind assisting the Voice this way. I am most appreciative. And now, if you wish to return, my radio-controlled car is at your convenience. Or will you come into my house for a drink first? I have—"

Pierlot stopped short for somewhere in the darkness of his large estate, a branch cracked very loudly. Pierlot reached for the light switch, and doused the garage in gloom. He drew a gun and moved toward the door.

"Please do not move, Mr. Quinn," he said softly. "I am afraid there are trespassers. I must go out and see."

Pierlot disappeared among the thick forest growth and Quinn gave him about three minutes before he started moving toward Pierlot's house.

It was easy to enter because Pierlot was sure enough of himself not to have locked the front door. Quinn went straight to the laboratory, kept one hand stretched in front of him in case that glass curtain was in place.

It wasn't, and he came to Pierlot's laboratory benches. On one of these was a radio somewhat similar to that which the Voice had sent him. It was larger though, more complicated. A quick look told Quinn the real story.

With this set a man could send as well as receive. It meant that Pierlot might be broadcasting those messages from the Voice, altering his own rather strident tones to match the mellower ones of the Voice.

On the inventor's desk was a silver framed photograph. Two people were in it, and one certainly, was Pierlot, although he was much younger in the picture. The other was that of a very pretty woman dressed in the fashions of about fifteen or eighteen years ago.

There was no further time to examine the premises. Pierlot might return to the garage at any moment, although Butch, who lured him away, had orders to keep him busy.

WHEN Pierlot did return, puffing badly and hopping mad, Tony Quinn sat on the running board of the electric car. He smoked a cigarette, and there were two butts on the floor to indicate just how he'd been spending his time.

"Is that you, Pierlot?" Quinn asked nervously.

"It is. There was someone prowling, hut he got away. Some tramp who blundered on my property, I suppose. You may get in the car now and be most careful next time you come. There are certain people who may know what I'm working on and they would sell their souls for my invention.

"I know how they operate. My experiences have been most bitter. Other things I perfected were stolen from me, but this one—it must not be. Goodnight and thank you again."

Silk drove to the appointed spot, and Quinn got into his car. They picked up Butch in one of the darkest spots in the road, where trees masked the site from Pierlot's house.

"Did I do it okay, boss?" Butch chuckled. "Say, that old bird can move pretty fast. A couple of times he almost had me."

"It worked splendidly, Butch. We'll all go to the lab now. As soon as we get there, I'll call Carol

over and we'll hold a council of war. This has been a profitable night."

Later, with his three aides gathered around him, Tony Quinn explained what he knew so far.

"The Voice of Justice is, as I suspected, out to garner a tidy sum for himself. How is he doing it? I'm not positive, but I have ideas.

"First of all we have Junky Malone, dead from gas poisoning. I believe he was murdered although there were few clues evident, and the shack where he died was destroyed before it could be examined thoroughly.

"Then Siggy Fox died. I know he was murdered and the business set up to simulate suicide. Now both Junky and Siggy were accused by the Voice of being the men who robbed a business firm and a home, respectively.

"Part of the loot was in cash and this was never found. Another part consisted of bonds and jewelry that were too hot to be easily disposed of. The Voice isn't turning back any of the cash involved, is he?"

"Tony," Carol said thoughtfully, "are you trying to tell us that the Voice contacts the real criminals who handled those jobs, takes the cash from them and then arranges to throw the blame for those crimes onto innocent men. Men who are known crooks could have done it, but didn't?"

"Exactly," Quinn leaned forward. "Turning the reward money over to Pierlot may be just a window dressing to make the police and the public believe the Voice has no financial interest in this business.

"Yet it seems to me that the Voice really does expect some material gain from Pierlot. How, I can't say, and I'm most interested to find out. In fact Pierlot may be the Voice. He has a shortwave sending set in his lab.

"McKendrick is a peculiar chap, too. He has given me to believe that he had some money hidden in that crypt. In fact, because I knew of the place, he thinks I took the money."

"What can we do to locate the Voice?" Silk queried. "He must have something pretty big on his mind. There isn't enough profit to risk so much for just what a couple of crooks will turn over to him."

"I'm afraid you're right," Quinn answered. "The Voice won't be satisfied with small profits, and I think he's just setting the stage for something very big. We've got to stop him before he gets into action, and there may be one way to do it. I'm sorry to say it will be very dangerous, and Silk is the only man who could handle the matter."

"Yes sir," Silk said. "Tell me."

"The Voice, no matter how powerful or all knowing he may be, cannot provide himself with cases like the ones Junky and Siggy were alleged to be involved in. If something turned up, he will probably bite at it.

"Suppose we set a trap for him. In disguise, Silk can rob someone, making sure to take jewels and cash. I can arrange the robbery easily, I'm sure."

"Any time at all, sir," Silk offered. "That's old stuff to me. If the Voice is looking for another sucker, I'll make sure he finds one. When do I start?"

"Tomorrow night," Quinn said. "At about ten o'clock. Mr. and Mrs. Britt are giving a war relief party. They have a nice collection of jewelry and plenty of cash. We'll work out the details later. Now let's talk about young Drake. Did you learn anything about him, Carol?"

"Very little," she said. "Everything favorable too. No drinking, liked his home and seemed quite contented with his wife. Everybody thought well of them both even though the neighbors know that Drake was under arrest. Butch discovered he hangs around a pool parlor a lot, smokes expensive cigars, but he doesn't drink."

QUINN thought of the way Drake had put down a hooker of very strong, very old brandy, neat, without batting an eye. Of course Drake really did need a drink at the time and was so excited the fiery liquor might have had little effect on his throat.

Butch and Carol left shortly thereafter. Silk busied himself around the house, and Tony Quinn sucked methodically on a pipe as he sat before the fireplace. The trap he was ready to set, with Silk's able help, might bring results.

If it did prove to be successful, he might find a trail which led direct to the mysterious Voice of Justice. At the very least, even if Silk failed in contacting the man personally, it would prove that the Voice's motives were not the sincere ones he broadcast.

Just why Pierlot was benefiting, was beyond Tony Quinn's ken. There must be a definite reason. Such men as the Voice did nothing without a concrete purpose.

If it was just publicity that he wished, something to make the public really believe he was a humanitarian and a philanthropist, then it would have been better and easier to allow recognized charities to benefit and not some obscure inventor whom few people knew.

In fact, Pierlot offered the best possibilities of being the Voice. Drake was undoubtedly just a chessman in this game of life and death while McKendrick played with fire and was in grave danger of getting his fingers burned.

The only thing that really nettled Quinn was the fact that Warner had named him as the go-between. Naturally, Quinn felt somewhat proud that Warner should have proffered his name as an honest and reliable person.

But now, if he learned anything through his

bizarre connection with the Voice, that information couldn't be used to help the Black Bat's investigation. Above all else neither the Voice nor any other person must realize that Tony Quinn wasn't blind and that he was the Black Bat.

CHAPTER XII
Attorney for Crime

AT three minutes of nine the following evening, Silk Kirby ducked onto the spacious grounds of the Britt place. He could hear an orchestra playing and the sound of gay voices. The party was in full progress.

Silk's closest friends would hardly have recognized him. He was no longer the nearly bald, somewhat impassive featured person who worked for Tony Quinn. Rather, Silk seemed to have aged ten years. There were deep, coarse lines on his face. His nose was broader and his skin more of a sickly hue, like a man who is unaccustomed to sunlight.

A perfectly fitting wig, glued firmly to his pate, was black as coal, and false eyebrows were of a similar color. His clothes were far more flamboyant than those which Silk Kirby was used to wearing. The suit was brown with line white bordered blocks. His tie was an unpleasant red and he wore a shirt that would have been the pride of Harlem.

Inside the house, Tony Quinn was busy. He knew where the wall safe was located and he also knew the habits of Mrs. Britt. At a party of this kind she selected her jewels according to the gown she wore, and she rarely decided upon the gown until just before the party. Therefore, most of her jewels were taken from the bank vaults, and those not used were merely stowed in the wall safe. Britt usually kept a fairly large sum of cash on hand, too.

The wall safe was in the study, practically deserted during the affair. Quinn reached it without attracting any attention. He went to work immediately. The wall safe was an old one, and Tony Quinn's fingertips have developed an extremely acute sense of touch. He could feel the tumblers drop into place.

He cleaned out the safe, stowing its contents into various pockets. Closing it again, he made his way back to the reception hall. Although he betrayed no emotion whatsoever, he was considerably surprised to see McKendrick just entering. The ex-convict gave him a quizzical glance.

Quinn reached the steps and climbed them, moving stiffly and keeping his cane extended to ward off objects which might be in his path. In the privacy of a bedroom, he appropriated a pillow cover, filled it with the loot and took a quick glance out of the window. Silk was there and waiting. Quinn raised the window shade all the way to the top.

Silk was eager to get started. He reflected that this was going to be one of the easiest acts of thievery in history. He skirted a group of chauffeurs who were playing rummy near the garage, reached the back of the house and gazed thoughtfully at the many windows. In one the shade was rolled all the way to the top. Silk glanced at his watch. In about thirty seconds he'd be on the first lap of a race with the Voice.

The window was wide open. At precisely ten, a white pillow case came flying out of it. This landed on a bush, and Silk spent a minute or two disentangling the thing. Holding it in one hand, he headed toward the row of parked cars. His next act was a trifle more dangerous. Drawing a gun, he approached a car that was headed for the street. The driver sat behind the wheel, reading a magazine in the soft rays of the dome light.

"Don't make a sound," Silk said gently. "Just open the door and get out. I'm borrowing this wagon, pal. Yeah—that's a gat in my mitt and I know how to make it go boom. Come on—stop stalling."

THE chauffeur obeyed, but he was a much bigger man than Silk, and he seemed to be imbued with a certain foolhardy bravery. As his feet hit the ground, he lunged toward Silk, heedless of the gun. Silk sensed his attack and he was ready. The sack of loot which he held in one hand, swung up and out.

It hit the chauffeur full in the face with enough force to split the pillow case open and spill part of the contents on the ground. But it served very well as a weapon of defense, for the chauffeur went down with a crash. Silk picked up a few pieces of jewelry, jumped into the car and drove off in a hurry.

He ditched the car several miles from the house, walked ten blocks and then took a cab. He paid off the driver near a subway station and a few minutes later swaggered into a brilliantly lighted tavern.

Silk knew this place from past experience. In his days as a con man he'd been told of it. Here a known crook could find refuge from the police or a spot where he might spend his stolen loot freely without worrying about the cops learning of it.

The tavern was open to the public, and the smaller room out front was frequented by people who hadn't the vaguest idea that not many feet away, behind a row of palms that masked a wall, was still another room, much larger, better equipped and humming with activity.

Silk went through the outer tavern without a pause. Two men in tuxedos barred his path further down a corridor, however. Silk smiled knowingly and gave them certain names. They were the names of men Silk knew frequented this place occasionally, but would not be there then. The racing season was going

strong in the South and West. Silk's former pals haunted those places at the height of the seasons.

"Wait a minute, buddy," one of the tuxedoed men snapped, "you're carrying a roscoe on you. No gats allowed in there. Check it with us."

"Okay." Silk fished out the gun. "Not a bad idea at that, if you mugs keep your eyes peeled for cops and stool pigeons. Say, suppose a guy has something to sell. You know, at a discount. What's the best way of getting rid of the stuff in this town?"

One of the men handed Silk a numbered tab with which he could reclaim his pistol. Then he led Silk to a narrow door and tapped on it. The door opened, as if those taps had been a signal. Silk's escort stepped inside, guided his eyes toward a table in a far corner and spoke in a whisper.

"See that guy? He's right. Knows everything too—smart as a whip. Talk to him."

Silk, wise in the ways of the underworld, didn't approach the indicated man at once. Instead, he ordered drinks for everyone and, while he sipped his own, studied the man. He saw a droopy-eyed, thick-lipped individual about forty years old and bulging slightly at the waist line.

Those half lidded eyes moved around the room constantly and were appraisive in their glances. This man, whoever he might be, was no fool. Silk was going to have to play his little game with all caution.

THE surest way to attract attention in a place like this was by spending money fast. Silk did so and took care to exhibit the roll of money stolen from the Britt house. Finally he decided the time was ripe. That sleepy-eyed stranger kept watching him, as if in approval. Silk sent a bottle of champagne over and followed it himself after a few minutes.

"My name is Juren," he said softly. "I'm new in these parts, but there's soft pickings here if I say so myself. I been nosing around, mister. They tell me you're a good man to ask advice from. Is that a fact?"

"It all depends, Juren. I used to be a lawyer before I bucked the cops and bid out a few guys. They got sore at me, and I was kicked out of the bar. I know how things are done, if that's what you mean. You're trying to get rid of stuff lifted from a family named Britt, aren't you?"

Silk reached for the champagne bottle and took a firm grip on its neck.

"Listen pal," he growled softly. "Smart guys are okay, but wise guys..."

"Relax. I'm Johnny Stafford. I heard the cop's broadcast just before you showed up here. Take my advice, friend. Get rid of those clothes. The chauffeur you knocked stiff couldn't describe your face much, but those duds—he got 'em down to the last thread.

"You got a lot of cash, which you've been blowing around here. Good—money is meant to be spent. But there's a matter of certain jewelry pieces you want to get rid of. Calm down, will you? Hand me that bottle and we'll both have a drink. I can do you a lot of good."

"Okay." Silk passed over the bottle. "I did pull that job, and I shoulda bumped that fool chauffeur. I got two grand left in cash, but the other stuff looks as though it's worth a small fortune. Looks like I'm on the lam so I've got to get rid of it quick. Would a percentage interest you?"

"Not in the least," Stafford said indolently. "Five hundred dollars would, but you don't have to pay me now. I'll give you an address. Go there and somebody will look at your stuff. I'll meet you later."

Stafford scrawled an address, passed the paper to Silk and indicated that the interview was finished. Silk got up, went back to the bar for another drink and saw Stafford summon a gimlet-eyed crook. When Silk produced his check for the gun, it was refused.

"We got orders you ain't to carry a roscoe tonight, pal. Tomorrow we'll hand it over. Sorry."

Silk shrugged and recognized Stafford's fine hand. The disbarred attorney didn't want Silk armed because he planned to meet him later on. It showed that Silk's deception had worked beautifully.

THE address proved to be that of a small candy store, wholly unprepossessing in appearance. It was located a block from a big public school and did most of its business during the daytime. There were lollypops and penny candy in one of the small windows. A few boxes of colored chalk, pencils and tablets adorned the other. A bell tinkled musically as Silk pushed open the door, and a burly man with thin, gold-rimmed glasses thrust up on his forehead, came from a back room.

Silk shoved the paper across the counter.

"Maybe you know this writing, pal. It's from a friend of yours."

"I know," the storekeeper bobbed his head. "Come into the back room. You have the stuff with you?"

Silk patted his coat pocket and followed the fence into the living quarters at the back of the store. He dumped the jewelry on a table. The storekeeper shoved a jeweler's glass against his right eye, took a quick look at several pieces and then peered closely at Silk.

"This is hot—very hot, eh? It was stolen not more than three or four hours ago at the most. And you want me to handle it? Nothing doing."

"Aw, listen to reason," Silk begged. "Suppose it is hot. What's the difference if you hang onto it or I do—except you can buy it now plenty cheaper than in six months."

"Two hundred dollars," the fence offered tentatively.

Silk gaped at him and seemed to have difficulty finding his voice.

"Two hundred measly bucks?" he yapped. "What kind of a sap do I look like? This is worth five grand. I expected to take a beating of, say, four grand, but you don't buy it for what you offered. I'd rather hand it back."

The fence gestured with both hands. "Then I think we shall do no business. I make but one offer. Good night."

Silk cursed softly and gathered up the gems. He dropped them into his pocket and stalked out. The attitude of this fence was so peculiar that he knew it must be trumped up.

Someone didn't want Silk to dispose of the jewelry. When he stepped on the sidewalk again, he had an answer. A car pulled up and Stafford called to him. Silk got into the front seat beside the disbarred lawyer.

"How'd you make out?" Stafford inquired with a broad grin.

Silk cursed again. "What kind of a guy is he? Two hundred bucks he offered. I'll toss it down the nearest sewer first. Say—are there any other fences who don't want to own the mint in the next couple of years?"

"I'm afraid not." Stafford shifted gears and drove north. "You see, there is a new regime in town. Men like that fence take orders. Anyway the stuff you swiped isn't so good. In the first place it's too hot, and, secondly, it has more of a sentimental than intrinsic value."

"You talk big words," Silk countered. "You mean the stuff ain't worth much? Holy smokes, I must have pulled a boner. That's what you get trying to work a strange town."

Stafford's eyes were glued on the road.

"Just the same. Juren, you showed considerable pluck and skill in getting your hands on that stuff. Men like you don't come along every day and I think I know someone who could use you. Ever work for a boss?"

"Nope—never will."

"But that's where you're wrong. It's true you only get a percentage of the take, but in the long run your profits will be bigger. But we'll talk about that later. Say—how about a little drink?"

Stafford pulled a flask from his pocket, told Silk to remove the stopper and then took a long pull at it. Silk watched him out of the corner of his eyes. Stafford's tongue was pressed against the neck. He didn't drink a drop. Silk did, however. He was prepared for almost anything to happen, and he had to go through with it.

CHAPTER XIII
The Voice Shows His Colors

SILK never did know quite what happened after that. When he opened his eyes again, he was seated in a very comfortable chair all alone. He stood up, but his knees felt wobbly and he sat down again fast. His mind was clear as a bell though, and he had an eerie feeling that he was being watched.

Slowly, like a man both afraid and surprised, he turned his head to examine all corners of the room. It was an elaborately fitted out place with expensive trappings. Silk's watch was intact and it told him he had been unconscious for a little less than two hours.

Finally, Silk got up again. He approached one of the two doors in the room and he kept twisting his head as if expecting an attack from behind. The door was locked. Silk growled something and kicked savagely at the panels.

"Please, Mr. Juren," a voice said; "Don't try to ruin my house. Just sit down. You're among friends. Stafford brought you here because he thought you were an able, intelligent man without too many scruples.

"It seems you robbed a house tonight—cleverly, too. I'd like to hear the details some day. That act proved to me you are a man I'm interested in."

"Yeah," Silk sneered. "What kind of a third degree is this? Why don't you show yourself so I can talk back?"

"But you can. I hear every word, Juren. Rather an aggressive person, aren't you? So much the better. Now listen and don't interrupt me. You have two thousand dollars in your pockets—also some jewelry of questionable value.

"Don't bother to look. We haven't touched it, and if you refuse to accept my offer, it will still be yours. The police have an excellent description of you. The chauffeur you struck is badly hurt. He may die and that means the chair. Will you stop being so jittery? There is a way out."

"How do I know this is on the level?" Silk looked in all directions. madly. "How do I know you're not a copper, and this is a nice little plant?"

"Would Stafford have been apt to turn you over to the police? No, Juren, this is quite on the level. Here is my proposition. Turn that money over to me and I'll arrange things so that another man—some stupid fool—will take the blame for your job.

"I never fail. For instance, you may have heard how the Voice of Justice revealed that Siggy Fox was a crook. Siggy didn't pull the job he was accused of. Siggy was just a foil and I'll get another to accept the blame for your crime."

Silk had definite orders from the Black Bat for just such an opening as this.

"What," he asked, "do you get out of it? The two grand I got? That ain't much for what you're giving. And who are you? I'm not working or anybody who is afraid to identify himself."

"I have a plan," the Voice said. "A very definite one. You see, I choose my men most carefully. To join my organization a man must have first proven himself, as you did with that Britt job.

"Alone, you invaded a house full of people and made off with loot. That not only takes nerve, which is essential to me, but you displayed extreme cleverness, which I hold as an even greater asset."

"Oh," Silk looked thoughtful, "I'm beginning to get it. You pin the blame on somebody else so I don't have to worry about being picked up for the job. Then I join your mob. You're cooking up a gang that's like nothing the cops ever were up against before. Am I right?"

"Correct—and shrewd," the unseen man responded. "That's it exactly. The men who work for me will all be specialists in their own lines. We'll plan the biggest jobs ever known, and pull them off without a hitch. Now I'll tell you who I am. Have you heard of the Voice of Justice?"

Silk looked up quickly.

"Have I! That rat is working right with the cops. He must have a lot of stool pigeons planted around.

"Hey! Wait a minute. You're the Voice of Justice! That's how you make the cops believe those saps you plant, are to blame for the various crimes. Good gosh, that's a perfect set-up.

"Will I join your mob? I'll say I will! There'll be plenty of dough working for a guy like you. When do I start?"

"Now," the Voice chuckled. "First of all, I want you to think back and tell me of any men whom you already know, who would make good adherents to our cause. Clever men like yourself. And let me warn you, Juren, there is no backing out.

"You'll take orders like the rest. Obey them blindly if necessary. Should you feel inclined to tell what you know, you won't live three minutes.

"You will also remember that I can always prove you did that Britt job, and I shall arrange things so that it won't be hard to prove that you killed someone so that he'd take the rap for you. I hope such measures are never necessary. We'll forget all that temporarily.

"Look in the corner—right in front of you. See that cabinet? It contains the choicest liquors I could get. Help yourself.. Drink to the success of our new organization. Drink to the moment when we strike first."

SILK went to the cabinet, poured himself a full measure of rye and held the glass high. Then he downed it, knowing full well the stuff was drugged. Silk never even made the chair. His knees buckled and he collapsed on the floor.

The Voice laughed and the hidden amplifier was cut off with a click. Two men entered, carried Silk out to a garage, put him in a car and he was driven to Central Park. In one of its darkest, most deserted spots, he was placed on a bench.

Silk awoke there and marveled that the drug left no aftermath of dizziness or nausea. The gems which had been in his pockets, were gone. So was all but a hundred dollars of the loot from the Britt job. Silk smiled wryly. This was a fairly expensive little trap Tony Quinn had set. That money, and those jewels would have to be replaced. The Black Bat was not a crook.

His watch told him it was nearly dawn. At anytime after midnight, Silk could contact Butch, and he decided to do this at once. Then he'd find some cheap hotel, get a room and establish himself there so that when the Voice sent for him, he'd be easy to find.

Butch, according to plan, had set up a crude newsstand on 59th Street, just off Park Plaza. It consisted of a couple of boards supported by boxes. Butch hadn't sold many papers. His heart wasn't in the work, and he kept looking for Silk constantly. As the hours went by, he became more and more worried.

Then Silk, in a disguise which Butch already knew, sauntered up, dropped a half dollar on the stand and picked up a newspaper. His lips didn't move as he spoke to Butch.

"Everything going off without a hitch. Voice planning big gang of picked men. Pass the word along and be here tomorrow night. Tell the boss a disbarred lawyer named Stafford fronts for the Voice."

"Thanks, bud," Butch handed over the change. Silk thrust the newspaper under his arm and walked east. A block away he pretended to study the headlines, but he managed to slip a message from between the sheets of the paper. He read it and gulped.

> "Exercise all caution. Randolph McKendrick at Britt party. Knows I was there and may suspect something. Chance he might be the Voice, so be prepared if you are asked any questions. Good luck."

THE ex-con man saw the logic of the Black Bat's warning. McKendrick, if he was the Voice or connected with him in any way, might suspect that Tony Quinn had helped to pull that rather astounding robbery to trap the Voice.

If that were true, Silk was in a difficult spot. Still apparently engrossed in the newspaper, he crushed

the note and, as he passed by a sewer drain, flipped it through the metal spaces. At least that was out of the way.

Suddenly, Silk was aware of two men who were rapidly coming up from behind. His wrists were seized, hands patted his pockets in search of a gun, and then he was pushed against a wall. Held there firmly. yet in such a manner that any passerby would only think this was a friendly conversation between a trio of night owls, the newspaper was yanked from his hand. One of the men opened it and looked carefully at all the pages.

Finally, he flung the newspaper into the gutter.

Silk had much more than these two thugs to worry about. It was clear that he'd been shadowed every minute since he left the park. Now, two blocks away, he could see another pair of thugs approach Butch at his newsstand.

Butch, losing his temper, grabbed both men.

He saw an argument start and Butch, losing his temper and his wits, grabbed both men, held them by the scruff of their necks and banged their heads together with a thump that was clearly heard even where Silk stood. Butch dropped his victims, peered down the street and started running in Silk's direction.

This dead giveaway was more than enough. Silk was hustled to the corner.

A taxi driver, cowed by a gun, shot away from the curb after Silk and his two guards piled in.

Silk made one desperate attempt to grab the door handle. A gun muzzle smacked him across the back of the neck then crashed down on his skull. Silk folded up in a heap.

Butch saw the cab vanish around a corner, looked in vain for another and realized that even if he got one, the chances of trailing Silk were very few.

The getaway cab had too much of a start.

There was only one thing to do—warn the Black Bat. Even the pair of thugs Butch had brained, were gone. Whether they'd left under their own steam or with the assistance of more members of the mob. Butch didn't know.

He hailed a taxi and had himself driven to a spot where he had parked the coupé. Then he streaked for Tony Quinn's estate with the bad news.

CHAPTER XIV
The Black Bat's Fear

TONY QUINN heard Butch out, and as the giant explained what had happened, beads of sweat fanned on Quinn's forehead. The laboratory felt stuffy, and at the same time Quinn's blood was running icy cold.

"Bad," he told Butch. "The worst possible thing that could have happened. I don't blame you. Seems the Voice never trusted Silk anyway, and his men were filled with enough suspicion to question Silk's purchase of a newspaper from a newsstand and that just happened to string up at that corner tonight. I hadn't figured on his being so carefully watched."

"You find out where he's at," Butch promised, "and I'll wade right in if I have to eat a bucket of hot lead doing it. If they hurt Silk, I'll bust their necks."

"Yes—that might be most delightful for both of us," Quinn said. "Unfortunately it won't work. because I haven't the faintest idea where they might have taken Silk."

"He said something about a guy named Stafford fronting for the Voice," Butch offered hopefully.

"Stafford?" Quinn gasped. "I know him. He's a two-legged rat. Kicked out of the bar because of crooked dealings. Smart too—smart enough to even be the Voice. Clever enough to act as his own front so as to confuse members of the gang.

"At least we have a vague lead, and we know what Silk uncovered. The Voice is the biggest crook of them all. He's getting together a gang of the most vicious criminals in the nation, framing their misdeeds on others and then murdering these saps so they can't deny the charge he placed on them as the Voice of Justice.

"Justice! That man doesn't know the meaning of the word. We've got a ghastly situation on our hands, Butch. Silk is in very serious danger, and the Voice is getting ready to unleash a gang that will murder and plunder to their heart's content."

"What are you going to do about it?" Butch asked.

"I don't know," Quinn groaned. "If McKendrick suspects that I, as Tony Quinn, had anything to do with the robbery last night, he must also suspect that I am the Black Bat.

"No one has ever come quite as close to my dual identity before, not even Captain McGrath. Butch—for the first time since I adopted the form of the Black Bat, I'm afraid. Unless we beat the Voice to his guns, we're licked."

It was gray dawn outside, and the lighter it became, the more dangerous it was for Butch to leave via the tunnel and the garden house.

"Stay close to your phone," Quinn told him. "Warn Carol too. She must be on guard. I'll contact you as quickly as I can. Gas the car up and be ready for action."

When Butch left, Quinn sat down heavily and tried to figure out his next move. Tackling Stafford might have severe repercussions, especially if McKendrick was the Voice and already suspected Quinn.

There was a net, as invisible as Pierlot's glass curtain, gradually closing in, and for the Black Bat there seemed to be no exit. The Voice was the most subtle crook he'd ever bumped up against. It was going to require all his tact and cleverness to outwit this crime czar.

There were two courses he might take. He could grab Stafford and make him talk—which was highly dangerous—or wait, and depend on Silk's natural ability to stall. Perhaps the Voice would tip Tony Quinn, via his radio messages, to pick up Silk for the Britt job. That too, was fraught with plenty of peril. Quinn remembered how Junky Malone and Siggy Fox had been found.

WHEN Quinn left the lab, it was almost time for him to start for the office. He took a chance and called Butch, giving him detailed instructions. Then he cautioned Carol to stand ready and gave her orders, too.

Breakfast didn't interest him, but he had to change his clothes. Passing through the hall on his way to the staircase, he saw a white envelope pushed beneath the door. He picked it up, ripped the seal and read the terse message it contained.

> "For another very interesting case, tune dials as follows: One to fifty-three; two to sixteen; three to one eighty-eight. Listen between nine-thirty and eleven this morning."

"A very interesting case," Quinn mused. "There are hidden words behind those printed ones, I'm afraid. At least I know where I stand anyhow."

Quinn dressed and phoned for a cab. When he reached his office, there was a large packing case there, addressed to him. Winkie, the law clerk, explained how it arrived.

"Big guy just brought it in. Says it's a special delivery of some books you ordered. Big case too—plenty heavy."

"Oh yes, I've been expecting them," Quinn said. "Don't bother about them. I'll take care of the matter later on. By the way, I ran into a rather important and highly confidential case last night. I'll be very busy from about noon on so we must clean up all details before then."

Quinn's growing practice kept him busy during the morning. He kept the radio tuned in between the arranged hours. The message came late this time. It was almost eleven o'clock when the monotonous hum was shattered.

As the time had elapsed, Quinn grew more and more worried for fear that the Voice had tumbled to Silk's identity and now refused to expose himself to Quinn again, even through the non-traceable route of the shortwave set.

He was actually relieved when the Voice spoke.

"Mr. Quinn, I have the pleasure of turning another criminal over to you. This one shows just how promptly I work sometimes. It's the Britt job of only last night.

"I haven't read about any reward offered, but because of the sentimental value attached to the stolen gems, I rather think Mr. Britt will be more than willing to pay, shall we say, five thousand dollars. At three o'clock this afternoon, please arrange for the police to pick up the criminal.

"He will be in the old Verona Metal Works plant, an abandoned building at the very end of White Street. Tell the police to use caution. This man is dangerous and may be armed. Later you will hear when to take the reward money to Pierlot. That is all."

Quinn clicked off the radio and considered the situation for two or three minutes. The Voice had never given him so much leeway before. There were four hours before the time when that abandoned factory should be raided.

Why? Because the Voice suspected Tony Quinn was the Black Bat and might don hood and cape to rescue Silk? There seemed to be no other reason. If the Bat did appear at that factory, then the Voice would be positive that he and Quinn were one and the same.

To save Silk meant probable exposure of his dual identity, but Quinn never hesitated. Silk was worth the exposure, and much more. The Black Bat was going to swing into action no matter what the consequences were.

But Quinn had a prearranged plan which might throw some doubt about his being possessed of full sight and also being the Black Bat. He stepped to the window and let a piece of white paper flutter to the ground. That was a signal. Five minutes later his communicating system buzzed, and Winkie made an announcement.

"Lady here to see you, sir. Says she has an appointment."

"Oh yes. She's here about that important matter I encountered last night. Send her in, Winkie. I'm going to lock the door and cut off this annunciator for perhaps two hours. If anyone comes, please have him wait or return later this afternoon."

THE door opened, and Carol came in. Quinn met her, acting his part of a blind man to the hilt. He closed and locked the door. Then he sat down behind his desk, cut the annunciator and waited two or three minutes during which time he talked to Carol as though she were a client.

Finally, he got up, walked over to that packing case which had arrived via Butch, who had acted as an expressman and quickly opened it up. There were many law books inside and he hastily discarded these. Hidden beneath them was the Black Bat's hood, cape, shoes and black clothing.

These were neatly rolled into compact wads. There was a pair of overalls, and a jumper inside too. Also a cap and a leather harness such as window washers use. He stuffed the Black Bat's regalia into his pockets, put on the overalls and jumper.

From the packing case he also took a pail, chamois and a rubber squeegee. Carol carried the pail into the adjoining washroom and half filled it while Quinn went over to a mirror and applied a pasty substance which filled in those deeply etched scars on his face.

He was no master at the art of disguise and his features were particularly difficult to erase, but Silk had taught him enough so that he managed to change the color of his skin to a much swarthier hue. His hair became coal black with a dye that would rinse out in a hurry. He put on a pair of glasses, inspected himself and decided this must do.

"If I fail, Silk is lost, and so are we," he told Carol. "That's why I can't miss. Stay here and talk out loud every once in awhile, as though we were carrying on a conversation. Wish me luck, darling."

He kissed her, very briefly, and then went over to the window. Raising it, he leaned out, hooked the safety belt into place and then climbed to the sill. He actually washed the window, although the time it required made him worry and fret. Every second brought Silk that much closer to his doom.

Finally, he maneuvered to the window of the next office, washed that and kept on doing this until he came to a vacant suite. He slipped inside. Moving fast, he stripped off the overalls and jumper, left them in a corner with the rest of his window washing equipment and then brought out an old. soft hat from under his shirt. He pulled the brim of it well down, prayed those scars were not visible, and slipped into the corridor. He went to the elevators, reached the lobby and walked boldly through it.

A block away Butch was waiting in the coupé, more nervous than Quinn had ever seen him. As Butch headed for the riverfront and that abandoned factory, Quinn left his disguise on, but drew the light somber clothing of the Black Bat over his own garments. It was broad daylight—the time when bats roost in some dark place and never venture out. Quinn felt more like a bat today than he ever had before.

"Pull up in some alley," the Black Bat ordered. "Listen carefully because I need your help. You are to walk directly toward the factory. When you get near it, begin to duck for shelter, but if anybody is watching, I want them to see you.

"After a few seconds of this, begin to retreat. That will draw any guards after you. Don't let them catch you, Butch—not even if you have to enjoy yourself and break a few heads. Get busy."

BUTCH blundered toward the place and then went into his act. If anyone was hiding near the door, or even inside, they'd be watching Butch intently. The Black Bat, hood in place, guns ready for action, went into crouching approach.

He disdained the front door—that would be too well-guarded. Instead, he circled the place and headed for the shipping platform at the rear. He reached this and ducked beneath it, certain he had been unobserved.

He heard the big door slide back. There were voices. Someone said:

"You two fan out and try to take that big lug. The others are going to force him right into your arms. No shooting. Use a knife if you must, but don't attract any attention or give any alarm. When you get back, kick the door four times fast and then two slow kicks."

Two men jumped off the platform and without a backward glance raced to their assigned posts. The Black Bat waited three minutes, counting the seconds on his watch. Then he clambered onto the platform, prayed he wouldn't be spotted and kicked the door in the prearranged signal.

It slid back. There was one man guarding it, and he made a desperate effort to reach his gun and screech an alarm at the same time. The Black Bat's gloved fist hit him squarely on the point of the chin.

There was a crunching sound because the Black Bat had put all his steam behind the plow. He was playing with dynamite now, and the fuse grew shorter with every passing instant. He couldn't afford to take the slightest chance.

He closed the door as softly as possible, disarmed the unconscious crook and then moved toward the center of the old factory.

It had been used as an iron foundry. Skylights were broken, windows thick with grime and the light inside was gray. There were shadows everywhere and these suited the Black Bat perfectly. There were old moulding forms stacked high and they offered a good shield for his approach. Behind them, he studied, the situation.

By raising a couple near the top of the pile, he had a clear view of the large interior. There were big supporting pillars at various architecturally strategic places. To one of these—near the northwest corner, a man had been tightly bound. There was a gag between his lips too.

Average eyes, in this gray gloom of the old building, might not have been enabled to distinguish the identity of the prisoner, but he was clearly revealed to the Black Bat. It was Silk!

CHAPTER XV

Strike First

IT was a trap after all, one calculated to draw Tony Quinn out of his guise as a blind attorney, put him in the raiment of the Black Bat and force him to expose himself. There would he men waiting and watching too. There was very little time to waste. The Black Bat knew that Silk was gagged so he couldn't give an alarm.

Behind the spot where the Black Bat stood was a small machine shop. He ducked into it and looked around. There were a couple of old, two quart beer bottles on the floor. A tin can half full of gasoline was on a bench, and there was a drum containing a small quantity of motor oil.

The Black Bat smiled grimly behind his mask and went to work. First, he filled each bottle with

three parts of gasoline to one of motor oil. He plugged both bottles, found some oily waste and tied this to the bottom of each bottle.

He saturated the waste with gasoline and then carried his home made bombs back to that shelter behind the moulding frames. The Black Bat had fashioned a favorite weapon used in recent wars. It was termed the Molotov Cocktail. By setting fire to the gas-soaked waste, the fuse was ready.

Then, when the bottle was hurled against some hard substance it would break, release the highly inflammable liquid inside, and this in turn would be set afire by the burning waste. Such fire bombs have proven themselves highly effective, even against heavy tanks.

But the Black Bat didn't know where the killers were hidden, and such information was necessary. A streak of faint sunlight came through one of the broken skylights and hit the cement floor just behind those packing cases.

The Black Bat drew a small tin container from his pocket and extracted a paper sticker in the form of a bat with his wings in full flight. Usually he pasted these on victims or near the scenes of violence he was forced to commit. They labeled the act as the Black Bat's and drove Captain McGrath slightly mad.

Stepping back, the Black Bat held this cut out form so that the sunlight would hit it and cast a weird shadow across the floor. It would be grotesque because the light wasn't right. Yet the Black Bat hoped Silk would recognize it.

He saw Silk suddenly lift his head. Then Silk caught on swiftly. He began to tug at the ropes and kicked the floor with his feet. To anyone else's ears those kicks were just the frantic struggles of a desperate man, but to Quinn they were signals.

He and Silk often communicated with one another in this fashion, especially when Quinn was posing as a blind man and had to send a message without the knowledge of any visitor. He used his cane then. Now Silk used his feet to equally good effect.

"Four men and machine guns behind furnace," he spelled out. "Ready to let you have it. Five more outside. Get away while you can. Don't mind me."

The Black Bat laughed softly, harshly. He got his Molotov Cocktails ready, lit a match and applied it to both gasoline soaked wads of waste matter. They flamed. He grabbed one bottle by its neck, stepped from behind the cases and hurled it straight at the wall behind the furnaces. The second one followed.

They hit the brick wall, ignited and hurled flame in all directions. A machine gun chattered. The shots went wild though because the gunner suddenly realized his clothing was afire. Four men came racing out, beating at their blazing clothes.

The Black Bat's automatics roared. Two of the men went down. There was no mercy in the way the Black Bat fired, only a cold hatred that made every bullet count.

THE machine gunner swerved to rake Silk with a fusillade of death. His finger only caressed the trigger lightly for he died suddenly, the back of his head blasted off. The remaining thug threw his gun away, raised both hands and yelled for mercy.

The Black Bat raced up to him, struck the man across the forehead and sent him sprawling. Then he cut Silk loose.

"Grab the machine gun," he said curtly. "The others will come back."

Two of the other men came through the front door and met Silk with the rifle. They surrendered without an argument. The other pair stumbled over the unconscious form of their rear door guard. Then they looked into the yawning muzzles of the Black Bat's automatics.

Ten minutes later, those who still lived were securely trussed up. From the pockets of one, Silk removed the jewelry stolen the night before. He dropped the loot around the victims, grinned at the Black Bat, and then both of them hurried out the front door. Butch was waiting. His facial muscles worked with rage.

"Doggone those lugs," he raged softly. "They wouldn't come close enough so I could bang 'em one. You got all of them, boss? Hey Silk! You okay?"

"Except for a few lumps here and there," Silk managed to grin. "They weren't too gentle when they hit me. But, sir," he faced the Black Bat, "your coming here like this is exactly what the Voice hoped for. Now he knows you're Tony Quinn."

"Not quite yet." The Black Bat peeled off his hood and replaced it with that soft hat. "We'll drop you close by the house. Let's go, Butch."

Silk got out and slipped into the house via the tunnel. Butch drove back to Quinn's office building. By now the black clothing of the Bat was removed. Quinn was ready to enter the building. He did so without arousing any attention, reached the vacant suite and let himself in with a key. Two minutes later, Butch came in too.

Quinn donned the overalls and jumper, strapped the safety belt around his waist and went to the window.

"Silk is safe," he said with grim satisfaction. "That's something. Now if the Voice wants to make sure that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat and really left his office, he'll be in the waiting room on some pretext or other. Perhaps I've given myself away,

but he'll do the same thing. Follow the orders I gave you, Butch."

Butch was putting on overalls and jumpers which matched those Quinn wore. He also strapped a safety belt into place and picked up a duplicate pail and equipment. Butch had stored them in the vacant suite two or three hours before.

QUINN clambered out of the window. reached his own office and went inside. The moment he disappeared, Butch, dressed exactly as Quinn had been, hooked his safety belt outside the window and began working.

Carol was there to help Quinn inside. He answered the question that glistened in her pretty eyes.

"It worked. Any trouble on this end?"

"I'm not sure," Carol answered. "You were gone only an hour, but someone is outside. I heard your clerk answering a lot of questions."

Quinn hastily removed the makeup, rinsed out the black dye and straightened his clothing. He picked up his cane. The mask of blindness came over his eyes.

"Meet me in the lab tonight," he told Carol. "Now the interview is over."

Quinn tapped his cane across the floor, unlocked the door and bowed to Carol. For a moment he almost jerked erect. He expected that the Voice would come to the office and prove that Tony Quinn hadn't been there when the Black Bat was in action.

He even hoped that by this means the Voice would give himself away. Quinn hadn't banked on the extreme cleverness of his opponent. There were four men seated in the waiting room. McKendrick, Drake, Pierlot and disbarred attorney Stafford.

Quinn gave no indication that he saw or recognized them.

"Anyone to see me?" he asked Winkie.

All four suspects started up, but Winkie used some firm diplomacy and made them take their turn.

McKendrick explained that he had received a phone call to see Tony Quinn at exactly one o'clock.

Quinn looked surprised. Then he had Winkie send in the others. They identified themselves and also explained that they had received messages, presumably from Quinn, to be at his office.

"But there must be some mistake," Quinn looked annoyed. "I don't even know you men, except for Drake who is my client. McKendrick, did I hear? Oh yes, we've met at social affairs."

"You know me also," Pierlot put in. "I thought something had happened about the Voice. I should not have been asked to come here, I am a sick man—my heart...."

"Quiet," Quinn warned. "That matter is strictly confidential. And did I hear the name of Stafford? I used to know a lawyer—"

"What is this—some new way to be funny?" Stafford growled. "I'm a busy man. I cooled my heels for half an hour, and now this guy says he didn't send for me. Somebody did and when I find out who, I'll bust him one."

Quinn got rid of them after awhile. closed the door and sat down.

"Blast!" he muttered. "Now which one of those men came voluntarily? Which one called the others here? Which one is the Voice of Justice?"

More and more he knew that the Voice had almost conclusive evidence that Quinn was the Black Bat. He'd attempt another trick soon just to make certain, and then would come the blow off.

Before that happened, the Black Bat must run down the Voice. What would happen then was highly problematical. If captured, the Voice was bound to roar out the Black Bat's true identity. He might have enough facts to warrant an investigation, and once Captain McGrath really got on the trail, he'd be harder to shake off than a leech.

The Black Bat had never killed a man in cold blood. He wondered if he could do it when he met the Voice face-to-face. Something would have to be done, without much question about it.

Circumstances would have to decide the Black Bat's final action—if he ever got the chance to act. Quinn found himself hoping for the first time in his life, that an enemy would face him with blazing guns. Man to man, he could shoot back and never have to reflect that he'd murdered a man without giving him a chance.

He settled down to routine business, but his mind hardly stayed on legal matters. The race was coming up to the finish line very soon now. The Voice was bound to strike, and victory lay with the man who hit first and hardest.

Quinn decided that very soon, ex-attorney Stafford was going to have a visitor he might not enjoy.

CHAPTER XVI
The Voice Takes an Inning

T nine o'clock that night Silk, Butch, Carol and Quinn were assembled in his secret laboratory. Silk looked none the worse for his bitter experience.

"They knocked me cold," he explained, "and dragged me back to that mystery house, where the Voice rules. They accused me of being an agent for the Black Bat and every time I denied it, a couple of them went to town on me.

"The Voice kept demanding that I tell the truth. I insisted that I was a lone wolf and they were

making a mistake. Then he said I could help prove that. They took me to the factory, tied me to that post and set the trap. I knew you'd come and yet I prayed you wouldn't.

"I prayed you'd act as Tony Quinn might be expected to act—that at three o'clock you'd tell the cops what the Voice's message was. I'd have been dead, of course. The Voice was through with me. I knew that if you came, the Voice would know you were the Black Bat."

"But he can't be sure," Quinn said. "The man was spawned in hell with all the devilish cunning of Satan himself, but he still isn't positive Tony Quinn is the Black Bat. I'm afraid he'll try to prove it though, and we've got to take precautions. He may watch the house. This meeting was so necessary that it deserved the risk, but from now on don't come near the place. We'll keep in touch by phone."

"Could I offer a suggestion, sir? I saw a lot of Stafford last night and today. The more I watched him operate, the more I think he is the Voice. The man has every qualification. He's educated, knows more crooks than any average person and knows how to handle them, too."

"But the other three," said Quinn, "are equally suspicious. First of all, we have Drake. Men who came to kidnap him, murdered his wife because she merely got in their way. Why didn't they let Drake have it?

"And when Drake first appeared in my office the Voice of Justice told secrets about him. I've checked to the best of my ability. and I doubt that Drake ever told anyone in the East about those misadventures in Chicago. How then did the Voice know about it?"

"But Drake was right in the office when the Voice spoke to you," Carol put in, "and Drake was in love with his wife. How could he have ever plotted her death? Why, she was sticking closer than ever to him despite the trouble he was in."

"The first part of your doubts can easily be explained. The Voice might have been a recording, as I told you before. Obviously the tones are disguised. As for the last part of your question, Carol, I agree. It hardly seems likely that Drake would go to such extremes.

"We'll consider Pierlot next. There's a strange man for you. He's clever as they come and he really has almost perfected something of huge potential value. An invention plenty of people would sell their souls to get.

"Now Pierlot needs money, which seems to be no outstanding feature when we compare him to the other suspects. However, we know he is profiting by the activities of the Voice. It's possible he doubles for our big shot criminal."

"Know what I'd like to do?" Butch said heavily. "Nab each one of those guys and go over 'em with a rubber hose until the right one squawks. Heck, maybe the whole bunch is in together."

"No—hardly that," Quinn said. "Let's consider McKendrick. Like Drake, he's a known crook. I know he hid money in the family crypt. The way I see it, McKendrick stole and knew he'd have to pay the penalty, so he prepared for it.

"Part of his stolen money was left hidden in the vault. He told Siggy, his cellmate, about this stake. Foolish, yes, but men do foolish things in prison to break the monotony. Now Siggy was grabbed by the Voice to be used as a foil for the Florida robbery.

"Suppose Siggy realized what was going to happen and tried to bargain. What would he have to bargain with? The knowledge that McKendrick had concealed a small fortune in the crypt. So he sold McKendrick out for hope which didn't materialize. Siggy died anyhow.

"McKendrick thought Siggy had robbed the crypt and went to have it out with him, but he was too late. The Voice sent his men to get that money. It seemed like a swell spot to hide those gems temporarily. Remember they were plenty hot. So they left them there."

"You're putting McKendrick in the clear, Tony," Carol reminded him.

"POSSIBLY. However, we don't know. We're not certain, and we must be as quickly as possible. Before the Voice smacks us down, we've got to deal him a death blow. Now I have two things to do. Your help is needed in both.

"Carol, when I visited Pierlot's house secretly the other day, I noticed a silver framed studio portrait on his desk. There were two people in it. Pierlot was one, and the other was a woman whose features I have seen before, but I can't seem to place her.

"While this may have little bearing on the case, it should be investigated. The photographer who took the picture is named Steiniger with a studio at 6580 Lenox Drive. He's still there. With good luck he'll have filed the proof of that picture under Pierlot's name. See if you can find out who the woman is."

"I'll call you back as soon as I get the information," Carol said and headed for the tunnel. "Then I'll go home and wait." She stepped closer to Quinn, put one hand on his arm.

"I know just how bad this is, darling. Count on me—even if it's a photofinish, and both you and the Voice are exposed. One more thing—I'd like to be in at the end, too."

"There," Butch yawned sleepily, "is a gal for

you. How about me, boss? Got a job where I can tackle a few of those mugs and clean 'em up?"

"Perhaps, Butch. Right now I want you to drive me. We're going to Stafford's place. He lives in a bachelor apartment and I know just where it is. Silk, you've had enough for one day. Stay here and rest."

Stafford lived in a neat little building in Greenwich Village. It was not extremely modern, for a fire-escape ran along the east wall between buildings. Butch entered the place on a pretext of looking at rooms. When he emerged, he knew the whole layout.

The Black Bat, clad in his dark clothing, but minus the hood and cape, waited in the car. Butch made his report.

"Stafford lives on the sixth floor. The window of his living room faces the fire-escape. A two cent sneak thief could bust in."

"Good," the Black Bat approved. "Stay with the car, Butch. I see a light in one of Stafford's windows. Not in the living room, but that doesn't matter very much. Stand ready for a quick getaway in case there is trouble."

The Black Bat glided down the alley and was instantly lost in the darkness. Hood and cape in place, he scaled that fire-escape as fast as a hand organist's monkey looking for pennies. The window of Stafford's living room was dark and closed too.

He saw that the window latch wasn't locked, reached for the frame and then hesitated. This was too much like an open invitation. His keen eyes peered through the darkness of the room. There was a high. solid backed chair in the further corner and jutting a couple of inches above it was the rounded dome of some kind of a metal tank.

The Black Bat took a diamond glass cutter from a small, compact kit of tools he carried on jobs of this sort. He made a large circle in the pane of glass, affixed a suction cup and gently withdrew the section of window pane. Now he could insert his head and shoulders to study the situation. He whistled softly, for the window was wired for something or other. The door too carried slender little wires into the middle of the room. Quinn reached down, broke the connection to the window and then raised it gently.

IF anyone was in the next room, he gave no sign of his presence, and so far the Black Bat had worked noiselessly. Drawing a gun, the Bat moved across the floor. He saw a small mound of gray powder with wires from the door and the window smothered beneath it.

A quick examination told him the story, and he made for the straight-backed chair with the tank behind it. Working rapidly, the Black Bat twisted the supply valve and cut off the escape of colorless and odorless gas. It was pure hydrogen, impossible to detect by the sense of smell or sight.

It probably filled the room, for the Black Bat found breathing a bit difficult, as though the air was rare and lacking its normal supply of oxygen. So the Voice knew he'd come to visit Stafford. This death trap was one which might have fooled an ordinary detective.

When the window was raised, or the door opened, an electrical impulse would send a spark through that heap of powdered magnesium. It would flare up, and the saturated air of the room would explode with all the violence of a charge of T.N.T.

There was no one in the next room. That light had been left burning as a lure. The Black Bat sat down on the arm of a chair and considered matters. The hydrogen tank intrigued him. Such tanks are always numbered and the name of the owner stenciled. The tanks are collected from customers refilled and resold. It required only a minute to determine who had title to this tank and what its number was.

There was a phone on the desk. The Black Bat looked up the number of the firm supplying the tank and gas, called them and blandly identified himself as Captain McGrath at Police Headquarters. This name brought magical results.

"Oh, yes," someone reported. "We have a record of that tank. It was installed about three weeks ago at the laboratory of a man named Pierre Pierlot. By the word 'install' I mean this and seven other similar tanks were dropped from our truck on a side road and left there for Pierlot to pick up. He uses a lot of the stuff."

"Thank you." The Black Bat hung up. So Pierlot owned that tank. Until now the Black Bat hadn't seriously considered the inventor as a good suspect because he was so completely engrossed in his work.

He'd displayed results too that proved he had little time to fool around with a crime plot such as that which the Voice of Justice was preparing. Yet, strangers would have a difficult time just finding Pierlot's place, let alone gaining entrance and stealing one of these very heavy tanks of gas.

The Black Bat searched Stafford's room, but there was little left to present any clue. The ex-lawyer seemed to have practically moved out. Disengaging the wires from that trap, the Black Bat climbed out of the window, descended the fire escape and headed toward the mouth of the alley, where the coupé should have been parked. It was not there any longer.

The Black Bat knew that Butch wouldn't have driven away of his own free will for any reason

whatsoever. Therefore, Butch must have been attacked, overpowered and kidnapped. The Voice had struck again. Apparently, Butch's kidnappers hadn't waited to hear the explosion, for that alone would have brought Butch into action and attracted a horde of police besides. They'd been confident the trap couldn't miss.

STRIPPING off his hood and cape, the Black Bat stowed this away and donned his wide-brimmed hat. It was risky business to take a cab, but the circumstances made it necessary. He gave the driver orders to drop him about four blocks from Tony Quinn's home.

As the cab rolled through traffic, he thought over what might have occurred. There were two things, one of which gave him cold chills. The Voice's men might have been watching Stafford's place and tackled Butch so that after the explosion occurred, he wouldn't be able to save the Black Bat. That was the easy explanation.

The more dangerous one lay in the fact that the Voice might have planted men near Tony Quinn's residence who saw Carol emerge from the garden house followed shortly by Butch and the Black Bat. This latter idea meant that the Black Bat's identity was well established by now.

He walked briskly away from the cab, darted through the yard and reached the small garden house. The hidden trapdoor was just as concealed as ever. He opened it, hurried along the underground passage and reached his laboratory. Without stopping to remove his hood or cape, he burst through the secret panel Into his study.

"Silk," he called out loudly. "Silk!"

There was no answer. Sweat poured down his face. He searched the whole house and there was no sign of Silk. No traces of violence either, but that wasn't to be really expected, for if they took Silk, it must have been done with considerable stealth.

The phone buzzed. Quinn practically leaped for the instrument.

"Yes," he barked.

"Whew!" Carol's voice came over the wire, calm and sweet, "you nearly bit my head off. I've got some dope—and is it rich. The photographer had the proofs of that picture and also a file on the subject. It was Pierre Pierlot and his younger sister.

"Another photograph was taken that same day of the sister and her daughter, Roseann. Now guess who she is. I won't keep you in suspense, darling. She—ohhh!"

Then someone quietly hooked the phone. The Black Bat went suddenly limp. They had Butch and Silk and Carol. It was a clean sweep—victory for the Voice. With these hostages the Voice must know he could force the Black Bat to bow to his will.

A slow rage began to permeate the Black Bat's soul. The limpness of defeat vanished. He wasn't licked yet. He knew what Carol had meant In naming Roseann as the niece of Pierlot. He knew just what the Voice of Justice was up to. The fact that he was completely handicapped by the loss of his aides, grated on him, but he prepared for action anyway. This situation called for extremes.

Inside his lab again, he opened a wooden box and removed three small, thin glass walled bulbs. With a pipette he allowed three kinds of chemicals to merge. Then he sealed the tiny necks of the bulbs in a Bunsen flame.

He placed them in a metal box, thrust this into his pocket and opened a large cupboard to reveal dozens of guns of all makes. He selected two forty-five automatics with hair triggers filled their ammunition clips and dropped a couple of extra loaded clips into his pocket.

Excited, desperate, he had paid little attention to unusual sounds, but now he slowly turned himself around the room. There was a steady humming sound somewhere, a familiar sound. Then there was a distinct click, and the hated Voice came on the air. Quinn sidearmed a stack of books aside and revealed a shortwave receiving set hidden behind them.

"Good evening, Mr. Black Bat. This is the Voice of Justice, and truly I may be called Justice tonight for I have solved one of the great mysteries and exposed the Black Bat. That is, I have exposed him for my own personal amusement.

"I alone hold your secret, but unless you do exactly as I say, this will not be for long. I have three good friends of yours with me at this moment. Their presence makes up, in part, for the destruction you wrought on my own band this afternoon.

"Trickily done, Black Bat. Splendid work, in fact. Now just in case you don't believe me, I shall permit the girl to scream just once. Twist her arm. Twist it hard! The tigress deserves it."

THERE was no scream, just a moan of pain that must have escaped through tightly closed lips. But it was enough. Tony Quinn's hands clenched and unclenched. The actual twisting of her arm couldn't have hurt Carol any more than that moan affected Quinn. He felt himself quiver with anger. Then he was all attention again. The Voice spoke with glib satisfaction.

"Not a very satisfactory scream. The little lady is extremely brave. Lovely too—or hadn't you noticed that with your poor blinded eyes?"

There was raucous laughter for a moment. Then, "You and I, Black Bat, cannot exist on the face of the earth at the same time and fight one another. You are equal to me in almost everything except perhaps, ruthlessness.

"Unless you obey me to the letter, these friends of yours will find out what I mean. Here is my proposition, sweet and simple. You join forces with me, which I desire far above anything else, and we take over the rule of all crime in the nation. We become powerful and rich.

"Or perhaps you are saying 'No'. Then here is the other alternative. I have my headquarters in town. The address is 590 Irvington Place. Several of my men will be there to receive you. Stafford will also be present and by the way, Stafford knows your double life. I told him just in case something happened to me.

"Stafford will see to it that you die, painlessly and quickly. This accomplished I promise to free your three friends. They haven't seen me. No one has seen me. They are in a room which I can watch.

"One of my men twisted the pretty girl's arm. I shall wait for your answer, and you have until three A.M. At that time your friends will die, one by one, the lady last—out of courtesy of course. For the last time I now say to you, "That is all."

Quinn shut off the radio and felt like smashing it. He faced two terrible alternatives—joining the Voice to become a full fledged criminal, or seeing death at Stafford's hands.

"No," Quinn said aloud. "I'll be blasted if I take such orders. I'll see Stafford, and I'll see the Voice. When I'm done, I'll either be dead fighting for Carol and the others—or there will be no more Stafford, no more Voice of Justice."

CHAPTER XVII
Three Glass Bulbs

THE house on Irvington Place turned out to be a mansion, set well apart from any neighbors and glowing with light. The Black Bat parked one of the cars from Tony Quinn's garage, pulled on his hood and cape and walked deliberately up to the front door. He pushed the bell and the door opened instantly.

But no one stood inside to greet him. He didn't reach for his gun, just stepped through the door and watched it close and automatically lock. Then Stafford's voice came through a concealed amplifier.

"So you chose to come here, did you? You have decided, eh? Well, you had one of two offers to select from, Mr. Black Bat, death, or obeisance to the Voice and to me. Which is it?"

"How can a man make up his mind so quickly about things like that?" the Black Bat said, and there was pleading in his voice.

"How can I be sure the Voice won't kill my friends no matter what I choose?"

"You can't be sure," Stafford snarled. "But you choose just the same. Walk straight ahead. Go through the door that opens.

"I'll meet you and rip that hood from your head, Mr. great, law-abiding, ex-district attorney Tony Quinn, who showed no mercy for me when they chucked me out of practice.

"The tables are reversed, Quinn. I'm on top now, and you'll lick my boots if I say so. March—you double-crossing, yellow-bellied rat."

The Black Bat marched, slowly, steadily, like a prisoner on his way to the electric chair. A door opened, and he passed into a large room. There were four men waiting for him. All held guns and looked as though they were ready to shoot.

Stafford entered, swaggering and cocksure. The Black Bat was searched and his guns taken from him. Stafford smiled sardonically.

"Before we go any further with this," the Black Bat said, "did any of your men hear you use my real name?"

"They did not," Stafford smiled contemptuously. "If that was revealed to every dumb crook, you'd be of no use to us. We're smart enough to realize that.

"Well, make up your mind, and no tricks. You don't stand a chance. My men have orders to riddle you if there's so much as a faint false move on your part."

"One question," the Black Bat said. "Are my friends here? Can I see them and be certain they are safe?"

"Later—at another spot," Stafford replied. "Now talk fast. Which is it? Us or death?"

THE Black Bat walked slowly toward the middle of the room and Stafford, who stood there waiting. All eyes were on the Black Bat's hooded face. None of the men noticed his right hand open three times and drop one of those little glass bulbs each time. They landed on the thick rug without making a sound.

Stafford was a little too sure of himself. He even lowered his gun slightly. Then, like a flash, the Black Bat leaped for him. With one hand he knocked that gun away and with the other seized Stafford by the throat in a relentless grip.

The four thugs moved forward, not daring to shoot, because Stafford's struggles spun both men around so fast there was danger of hitting him. Suddenly, there was a crunching sound and a column of thick, yellow smoke soared high, hit the ceiling like a waterspout and descended to cover the whole room. Another glass bulb was crushed under the feet of one man and then the third went off.

Those yellow fumes were choking, searing, blinding. The thugs dropped their guns and tried to press handkerchiefs against their burning eyes. That did no good for the handkerchiefs were saturated with the gas on their way to the faces of their users. Stafford, still being grimly choked, took the full brunt of the fumes.

The Black Bat seemed to be unaffected by them. Beneath his hood was a small cloth mask soaked with a neutralizing chemical. The fumes didn't bother him at all. Even his eyes seemed to be impervious to the action of the stuff.

He thrust Stafford at arm's length and let him have a sharp blow on the chin. Stafford flew back, hit a chair and fell over it. He didn't move.

Now his acute sense of hearing served him well for he couldn't see through this yellow fog. One man veered out of the fumes toward him. The Black Bat slugged the man hard.

Then he moved in to find the others. In two minutes they were stretched on the floor. He recovered his guns, flung theirs through a window, then collared Stafford once more. The ex-lawyer struggled feebly. The Black Bat hit him again, threw the man over one shoulder and went out into the corridor.

HE picked up a phone, dialed headquarters and got Captain McGrath.

"This is the Black Bat. Come out to 590 Irvington Place. You'll find four of the Voice of Justice's men here—wanted crooks. Make them tell who really committed the jobs which we pinned on Junky Malone and Siggy Fox."

He hung up and hurried out to the car, flung Stafford inside and drove away in a great rush. It wouldn't take long for McGrath to reach the house, and the Black Bat didn't want to be stopped now.

Well out of the city, he pulled over beneath the sheltering branches of a big oak, shut off the lights and shook Stafford back to consciousness. Stafford blinked, gave a sharp cry and remembered where he was. Then he saw the muzzle of a .45 looking like a howitzer at short range.

"I'm afraid you waded too deeply in the muck of crime this time, Stafford," the Black Bat said. "You know I am Tony Quinn. Can I be expected to permit a man like you to live and retain this knowledge?"

"Listen. Listen, Quinn. This wasn't my doings. It's the Voice. He made me do it. Honest he did. How could I help myself? If I refused, he'd have sent some of his strong arm mugs to rub me out.

"Listen, please listen, I'll keep your secret. I swear I will. Nobody will ever know. You can cut my tongue out—"

"Stop being foolish," the Black Bat snapped. "Who is the Voice?"

"I don't know. That's a fact, Quinn. I've never seen the guy. He always gives orders by talking into a microphone in another room. Nobody ever sees him. But he's got your friends.

"I'll make you a proposition. Promise me I'll go free, and I'll help you rescue them and knock off the Voice. He doesn't deserve to live anyhow. That guy is crazy, I tell you. He's mad with a lust for power and it's being sated.

"Half the underworld is crawling to him already. They're all afraid of the Voice of Justice, and he's passed the word along that unless the big shots come to him, he'll expose them.

"He's a killer. He murdered a lot of guys he didn't trust. He'll kill your pals too—no matter what your answer would have been, they were doomed."

"That," the Black Bat said, "isn't exactly news. Where is he holed up, Stafford?"

"I'll show you. It's an old farmhouse—right on this road too. It ain't far. I'll take you there and—"

"Stafford," the Black Bat said, "you're an unmitigated liar. You'd promise me anything and sell me short at the first opportunity you saw.

"The Voice isn't at any farmhouse. He's at Pierre Pierlot's place and that's where we're going. You hoped to trap me in some forlorn spot when I wasn't on guard."

"I meant that place," Stafford whined. "It's something like a farmhouse. I'll show you the way in. Nobody can find it unless—"

"I know the way in. Shut up and keep that way or I'll put you to sleep again. Mind you—try to grab this wheel or open the car door, and I'll bury a .45 in your heart.

"You seem to have forgotten, Stafford, that three of my very best friends are prisoners of the man you work for. More specifically, the girl happen. to be in love with me and I with her.

"I'd give my life for them, gladly, but first I'll fight. I took you and that quartette of stooges without much trouble. Don't you think I can land the Voice, too? Watch and see."

CHAPTER XVIII
Reversed Fate

BUT as the Black Bat drove out of the shelter of the tree, there were still doubts. The Voice had demonstrated his skill. He held the whip hand, in that the Black Bat's three aides were his prisoners.

With Carol at the point of a gun for instance, he could hold off the Black Bat yet—even force him to disarm and surrender to Stafford. Try as he might, the Black Bat couldn't see any

way out of this unless he surprised the Voice, got him dead to rights and extinguished his warped, useless life. That was going to be very difficult for the Voice would be hidden somewhere. Even his own men couldn't get at him.

He turned down the lane which led up to Pierlot's hidden place, stopped and nudged Stafford with a gun.

"We'll start hiking now and just a word of caution. I can see as well in darkness as in light. If you bolt, there is no escape, unless you call death escape. I know all about the various signal traps which Pierlot has set out. Don't try to trip one of them. Your life depends on my getting into that house safely and undetected."

Stafford shivered and led the way. They reached the point where the radio controlled car turned off on the fake sod. Stafford skirted this spot, wriggled through brush and finally came out on a path which led up the ramp to the garage and from there directly to the house itself.

The place was shrouded in its usual blackness, for the steel window shutters were tightly closed. Getting in quietly was going to be a problem. But Stafford was known here. He could get through. The Black Bat seized Stafford's arm and held him back.

"How many of the Voice's men are inside?" he demanded.

"Only three. There were just seven left when you got through busting us up at that old factory. The cops got the rest of them."

"Excellent. Now you're going to get me through. If there is any signal arranged, give it. Make them open the door. The guards won't be suspicious when they spot you, and by the time they see me it will be too late.

"Stafford, never lose sight of the fact that so long as you and the Voice live, I'm in grave danger. It would require only a very slight excuse for me to kill you."

"I'll do it. I'll make them open up. I'll even grab the guy at the door if you say the word, Quinn. Honest—you aren't in as much danger as you think. The Voice can't match you. He'll be dead before morning. You'll kill him. Then there is only me.

"Nobody else knows you are the Black Bat. I swear that's the truth. Let me go when this is over, and I'll take a boat to South America, anywhere you say. I just want to live."

"That chance rests in your own hands. Get going, before the Voice decides he's fooled around long enough with his prisoners and wipes them out. If that should happen, I'll show no mercy to anyone, including you."

Stafford's legs seemed almost too weak to carry him up that ramp. His face was pasty, his lips trembled and his nostrils moved in and out as he breather short gusts of pure terror. Stafford was licked now, but give him one chance and he'd turn like a cobra, ready to strike and kill. The Black Bat knew his men. Stafford was one of the worst.

THEY reached the porch, and Stafford stepped up to the door. He scratched the panels with his nails, a signal that he was a friend. Someone opened a slit set high in the door, peered out and saw only Stafford. Heavy locks turned and the door swung back. Stafford took a single step and then a gun butt crashed down on his skull.

The door guard saw him toppling forward, tried to close the door then stopped doing anything beyond holding his shaking hands high up in the air. The Black Bat motioned that he was to turn around. The gun butt came into play once more.

Silently, the Black Bat closed the door, drew his second gun and stole forward. He knew the layout of this house, which helped a lot. The laboratory was at the far end of the place but there were rooms to cross first and any one of them might be a trap.

He stopped and listened. Not a sound reached him. Moving forward, he negotiated the dining room, peered into the darkened study just off it and saw no one. He veered to the left, heading for the other exit and the laboratory. His friends might be locked there, or in the cellar or even on the second floor. His first move was to find them.

The door to the lab was shut tight. Gripping the knob firmly, he pushed it open a fraction of an inch. The room was in darkness. He started to turn away and continue his search. Then he paused, entered the big lab and walked through the blackness without making a sound.

He kept one hand stiffly forward but apparently the glass door which Pierlot had showed him, was raised. His eyes saw a dozen hydrogen tanks all around the place, some up against the bench and others in that outer section of the lab which was separated by the invisible glass.

The Black Bat spent ten minutes there, working hard and perspiring freely. Then he returned to the study just in time to see another guard spot Stafford and the door watchman. He raced over to them.

The Bat gave a silent leap, throttled the man and knocked him out. Stafford was groaning. The Black Bat seized him to stifle the sound. He raised the man up, shook him and Stafford opened his eyes.

"You had a slight accident," the Black Bat whispered. "The door guard tried to slug me and caught you instead. Don't speak. Don't make a sound. Where are the prisoners?"

Stafford pointed upward. At the Black Bat's orders, he went up the staircase slowly and on tiptoe. At the top he turned left, passed by a couple of closed doors and then indicated a third one.

The Black Bat motioned with his gun. Stafford opened the door a crack, looked scared and then, with a wild shout, leaped through. the entrance and slammed the door in place. A bolt shot home. Stafford's derisive laugh reached him. There was a click and the Voice spoke.

"What's going on? What's happening?"

"Plenty," the Black Bat shouted. "Perhaps you recognize my voice. Yes—I'm here. So is Stafford. You're finished, done. The only way to save your life is by turning my friends over to me."

The Voice laughed and the raucous sound rang through the corridors. As it stopped, the Black Bat heard a gentle step below, swerved and saw the third and last of the thugs sighting a pistol at his back. The Black Bat's guns replaced that wild laughter. The thug landed on his face and lay still.

"That takes care of your staff," the Black Bat said loudly. "Stafford is next and then you—unless those three hostages are released. What's your answer?"

"No! Unless you throw down your guns and surrender, I'll wipe those three lives our during the next ten seconds."

"Try it!" the Black Bat challenged. "They'll die, yes, but you and Stafford will never get out of here alive. You still haven't killed me and you can't do it. You're afraid to show yourself and shoot it out. You know I'm faster on the trigger and straighter with my aim. Kill them and you die too. Think that over."

It seemed that the Voice did so. Finally, he spoke again.

"We'll bargain. I'll turn your friends loose. Take them away from here and keep your mouth shut about what you know. If you talk, so do I. If I go to prison, so does Tony Quinn alias the Black Bat. Is it a deal?"

"Where and when will you produce my friends?" Quinn asked sharply.

"In the laboratory downstairs. You go there now. Walk straight over to the benches and remain there. You may keep your guns on Stafford. He'll bring the prisoners. You don't know who I am, so we'll keep that little secret for the present. I'll even throw in Pierlot and wager you thought he was the Voice of Justice."

"I'm going down," the Black Bat answered. "I'll wait three minutes."

He descended the stairs. The thug he'd shot was dead. The other two were completely out and would be for probably an hour yet. The Black Bat moved silently into the laboratory, pausing for just a few seconds before he walked through Pierlot's invisible glass wall.

AFTER two or three minutes, Carol walked in, gave a cry that was both glad and unhappy, and ran toward the Black Bat. Butch and Silk came next, followed by Pierlot and Stafford who carried a brace of guns.

Pierlot was badly shaken. There were bruises on his face, and one hand dangled limply as if it were broken. He could barely totter along and Silk kept an arm around his waist.

All five of them lined up against the laboratory bench. Stafford, a sneer on his face, moved toward the wall. His hand touched a small switch. There was a whirring noise, but that was all. Nothing seemed to happen. Stafford lowered his guns.

Then the Voice of Justice reached the five people. It sounded like the Voice of Doom.

"So we are all very comfortable now, eh? Fine! At last, Mr. Black Bat, I've cornered you just like a rat. When you saw Stafford move that switch, you didn't think anything happened, but it did."

"The glass door. It is shut. They have changed the switch," Pierlot yelled. "We cannot get out of here."

"I know that," the Voice remarked in glee. "I also am aware that those several tanks of hydrogen gas have been open for some time—ever since you started downstairs, Mr. Black Bat.

"I jammed the valves so you can't close them and shut off the flow of gas. In about five minutes that small room will be filled with the stuff. Then Stafford has only to close the other switch. A tiny spark will blow all of you to bits. This is exactly as I would have it."

Stafford moved back, the light of murder in his eyes. Pierlot fainted.

"Wait a minute," the Black Bat said. "Why don't you come down and show yourself, Drake? Why are you afraid of being recognized by five doomed people? Or don't you like it because Stafford just heard who you are?"

There was a strangled oath from the amplifier. One minute later Drake, Tony Quinn's first client, stormed into the room outside that glass panel. When he spoke, his voice could be heard. Apparently, the whole house was wired.

"So you guessed it, did you? A fat lot of good it will do. How did you know? How did I give myself away?"

The Black Bat held up the silver framed portrait on Pierlot's desk.

"By this, partly. It's a picture of Pierlot and his sister, who was the mother of your dead wife. She was the sole heir of Pierlot. When he died, you became the heir. You wanted to provide Pierlot with cash enough to finish his experiments.

"Then he would die and you'd inherit the secret of his invisible glass. It was all to be perfectly legal, and nobody would ever suspect you. But Pierlot refused to accept money—any kind of money—so long as he knew who his backer was.

"Pierlot had been tricked out of other inventions too often. He was suspicious even of you, his nephew. Things were going along fine, or so you thought, Then your wife must have got wise to it all.

"You married her only to become Pierlot's heir. You pretended to be a great homebody, but you couldn't resist pool halls or expensive cigars. You never drank unless there was a chance of getting away with it. Oh, you were very careful, but she found out anyway."

"Yes, she did," Drake snarled. "I had the gang assembled. I was carrying the bonds which were later planted on Junky Malone. She found them and accused me of stealing more money. I quieted her down, said I was going to bring them back, but I knew she'd squeal.

"I hated her anyway, the pious, law-loving fool. So I, as the Voice, told my men to kill her and kidnap me. That was to make them unsuspicious that I was the Voice. They were to take me away, hold me a few hours and then let me go.

"That big ape of yours almost spoiled it. He and the girl. Now I'll spoil all of you. For a time I thought I had you fooled. That was before I knew who you really were. Not even Pierlot knows your true identity.

"I kept it secret so if you joined me, you could go on as you were. I picked Police Commissioner Warner to tell me the name of an honest man. That was for publicity purposes. I wanted everyone to think the Voice of Justice was a law-abiding, crime-hating person.

"I will still keep up that pose. No one can stop me—not even the indictment drawn against me for stealing the two hundred thousand dollars from the bank.

"I needed that money to organize the nucleus of my gang—those men who would tell me about other crooks so I could expose them and show myself as the Voice of Justice.

"I learned auditors would be at work on the books soon, so I needed time. I had to stall. Once I got my gang together I could drop out of sight. That's why I hired a lawyer.

"I hired you, Quinn, because Commissioner Warner had already indicated you were the best contact man for the Voice. I wanted to stay close to you and be sure you obeyed the Voice's orders.

"Through him I could have my sentence postponed. Through the profits from the gang I could have made restitution easily. I even went so far as to reveal myself as a former crook. No one would suspect me then. And now—if you are quite ready—it is the end."

"Wait!" Pierlot raised one hand. "I should have known it was you. The radios should have given it away. You were always interested in them, you even considered yourself something of a scientist. You knew I'd never accept help from you because I didn't trust you, my own nephew."

"You doddering old fool! The only thing that worried me was that you'd drop dead before you finished this work. Now you will die—you and all the others."

"I wouldn't try to blow us up," the Black Bat said coldly. "Sometimes bombs have a habit of reversing themselves. They explode in the persons who try to set them off."

"Bah," Drake derided. He reached for the switch. "Here it comes!"

He sent the switch home. There was a terrific roar. Part of that room seemed to be turned into atoms. The explosion sent the Black Bat and all the others smashing against the lab benches. The concussion was terrific, but that invisible glass wall held firmly. Pierlot had maintained it could withstand even high-powered shells, and this proved his point.

WHERE Drake and Stafford had been standing was only debris. The Black Bat sighed deeply and put one arm about Carol.

"I warned them, the poor fools. They tried to set a similar trap for me at Stafford's apartment, and I thought they might use the same means here. That's why I studied the situation first.

"You see, I merely switched the tanks of hydrogen. The empty ones were placed in here, behind the glass wall. The full ones were in that other section of the room. Changing the spark induced by that switch was a simple matter.

"Drake or Stafford didn't smell the gas, for it has no odor, and they didn't hear it hissing out of the tanks. I kept talking too much and tried to coax Drake into raving a bit, too. They were too excited to notice any difficulty in breathing as the hydrogen displaced the oxygen."

"It was ghastly!" Carol buried her face in one

crooked arm. Silk looked grim, and Butch's lower jaw was thrust out more aggressively.

"My glass wall works," Pierlot cried, coming to. "And he tried to take it from me. He tortured me, broke my arm, and I had to give him the formula. He knew I'd finished my experiments, perfected my product and he didn't even want to wait until I died so he might cash in on my estate. He killed Roseann. Drake received what he deserved. what he built up to these many years."

"Yes," the Black Bat said. "He killed himself. Well—we'll be on our way, Pierlot. I'm glad your experiments have been successful. If you need more money, I may be able to arrange that, too. Remain here.

"There are two thugs in the front hall. We'll tie them up. In a short while police will arrive and a doctor to take care of your arm. When they come, you may explain the facts of the case.

"Then get the results of your experiments into the proper hands as quickly as possible. There are always men like Drake, who believe they are greater than law and decency. It's too bad they couldn't all have been here tonight and seen what eventually happens to their kind."

Pierlot watched them walk slowly down the ramp. Drake's car was not far away, and they knew it. Pierlot shook his head from side to side.

"I am glad that I do not know the hooded man's identity. Those friends of his I shall never mention to the police. Such people as those—well, the world could use many more of them."

THE END

POSTSCRIPT by Will Murray

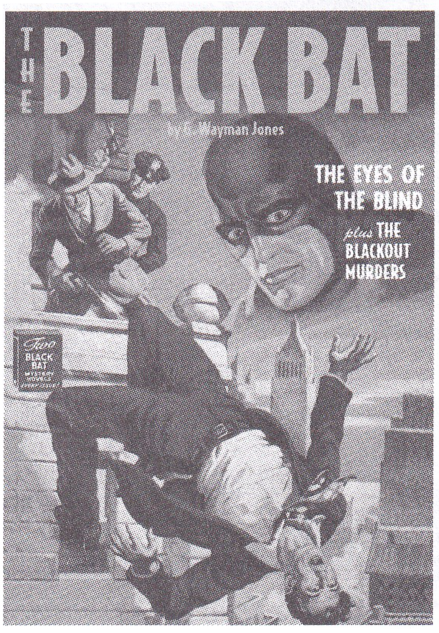
In our second selection, *The Voice of Doom,* Daniels borrows another page from *The Shadow Magazine*. This is the oft-used device of a rival crimefighter, who may or may not be on the up and up. In this case, the new entrant calls himself the Voice of Justice, and forms an alliance with Commissioner Warner of the metropolitan police force and Tony Quinn.

First published in the November 1941 *Black Book Detective*, this exploit was submitted under the working title of "The Voice of Justice" the previous March. Here, two new characters are introduced. Quinn's office stenographer, June Marlowe, who is the daughter of a murdered police officer, and his law clerk, known only as "Winkie."

As you will shortly read, *The Voice of Doom* follows the pattern of classic Shadow novels such as *The Cobra* and *The Vindicator*—but with twists of their own.

A question lingers: Did wordsmith Norman Daniels read these novels and set out to emulate them? No one seems to have asked. But he had ample opportunity to do so. Under his own name and the house name of "Jack Storm," Norman A. Daniels was a frequent contributor to the back pages of *The Shadow*!

Two strong cases for the Black Bat. Norman Daniels is once more firmly in control of the series he originated. Will this trend last? Future volumes of *The Black Bat* will reveal other writers who hid under the house name of "G. Wayman Jones." •



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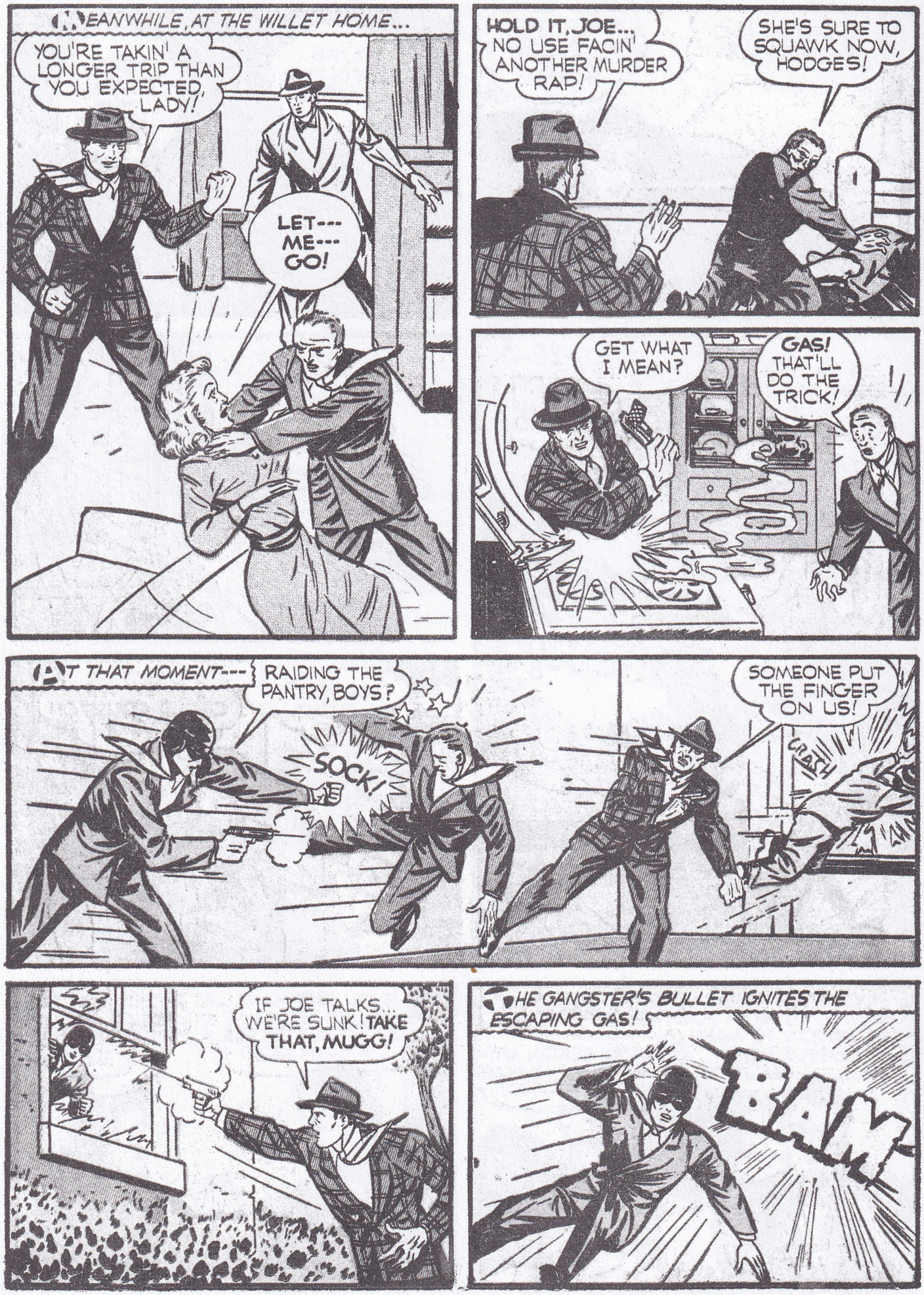

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